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ABSTRACT

This document, comprised of six bimonthly issues of a newsletter, focuses on home schooling and providing parents in the United States and other nations with ideas, activities, research summaries, and resources to teach their children at home. Each issue contains short news items and reports on home schooling, letters from parents, information on the challenges and concerns of home schooling, a focus topic, book and resource reviews, and a resource and information list. Feature reports and letters from parents include the following: (1) "Why Mentors Love Mentoring" (Jan-Feb); (2) "Learning through Play" (Mar-Apr); (3) "On Saying 'I Don't Know'" (May-Jun); (4) "Learning Surprises" (Jul-Aug); (5) "The Art of Listening" (Sep-Oct); and (6) "Parents' Values" (Nov-Dec). (KB)

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'S ISSUE 126 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1999 US$6

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

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- LEARNING FROM THE COMMUNITY
- CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
- INTERVIEW WITH

Madeleine L'Engle

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ISSUE #126
JAN./FEB. '99

GWS

FOUNDED IN 1977
BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

EDITOR - SUSANNAH SHEFFER • PUBLISHER - PATRICK FARENGA • BOOKKEEPER & PROOFREADER - MARY MAHER • CONFERENCE COORDINATOR - DAY FARENGA • COMPUTER ADMINISTRATOR - GINGER FITZSIMMONS • OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR - ELIZA PACKARD • OFFICE ASSISTANTS - MARION WEBSTER & SUZANNE MACDONALD

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From the Editor

"Here are two poems I wrote today," the letter begins. "I'm dying to have somebody read them, as I'm kind of intoxicated with the feeling of writing right now." This is from a young writer who sends me her work and asks for my comments. Her pleasure in writing, and in having an adult with whom she can share that feeling, is obvious. Is it equally obvious that I too delight in receiving her letters and poems? That working with her and others like her is a treat, not a chore?

A few years ago I was speaking with the mother of a 16-year-old who was begging her parents to let her leave school. Her mother was concerned about what her daughter would do if she left, and as we spoke about possibilities, I returned frequently to the idea of connecting with adults who could share what they knew. The mother was skeptical. "It's just hard for me to believe that there are people who would want to help my daughter like that."

Somehow, in today's world, it *is* hard for many parents to believe that other people whose professions are not necessarily designed to include helping the young would nevertheless choose to offer that help. But there are a fair number of people who are *not* teachers (or counselors or youth leaders), whose work doesn't regularly put them into contact with young people, but who (sometimes for that very reason) welcome the chance to connect with a child or teenager. For this issue's Focus, we asked three adults who mentor homeschoolers to tell us what they get out of the experience. Here are three adults in very different fields saying that having a young person around is fun, it's interesting, it's not the amazing self-sacrifice some people imagine it to be.

On a very visceral level, it's gratifying to see someone else discover the particular pleasure of the things we ourselves enjoy. When I get a letter saying "I'm intoxicated with the feeling of writing," I think to myself, *wow, she knows what it's like.* (Yes, I think that when a kid complains of the maddening frustration of writing, too.) And it's not only the most profound parts of the experience that are fun to share. I get a kick out of discussing details like commas or line breaks with kids, too, so I have no trouble understanding the fun computer programmer Max Rivers has discussing technical details with the 16-year-old he mentors, or artist Colette Yon has answering her 15-year-old friend's questions about how to capture light on canvas.

One of the young people who considers me her writing mentor once asked me if I had had such a writing mentor myself at her age. Maybe she expected that I would say yes, that in helping her I was drawing on a memory of how I myself had been helped. But although I did have some very helpful adults in other areas, when it comes to writing, my experience is closer to what Max Rivers says in this issue of GWS: we mentor people in the way that we wish we had been mentored ourselves. We offer what we wish we had been offered. Feeling as young people that there had to be another way, we try to live that "other way" when we have the chance as adults. No wonder the experience is rewarding for the mentors as well. – Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Information Nights

Martine Palmiter (MD) writes:

When I first started homeschooling, I was desperate for information and friends who were homeschooling. These were difficult to find at first, but I followed one lead after another. I am grateful to those first few people I spoke to, and I eventually became a contact person in my area myself. I enjoy helping people, but I soon found out that my time was being eaten up by the phone. So, I decided to do two things to protect my personal time with my kids.

Another woman and I developed a Homeschool Information Night for the public. I wanted to be able to tell people on the phone that I couldn't answer their questions right now, but they could come to the upcoming information night. I developed flyers on my computer that I mail to each public library about six weeks ahead of time, I put ads in all the classified community sections of the local papers, and I give spare flyers to my friends for post offices, grocery stores, etc. I also send a flyer to the county education department that receives requests from parents about homeschooling. They know very little about homeschooling and are glad for the information.

Then, I assemble a panel of four families to speak about their experiences. I have found it very important to get a variety of families each time: an unschooling family and a family that uses a curriculum, a family with teens, a family with one child or whose two parents worked, a family with more than three kids, a father. I try to have a teen on the panel or at least to have children of the adult panelists there in the audience. We heard over and over again from the audience that "seeing the kids made all the difference" (i.e. the kids seem normal and excited about homeschooling).

I ask questions of each panelist for the first 45 minutes to give the panelists a safe start and to get the basics out of the way. "Tell me about your children and have they ever been to school," "What are the benefits of homeschooling to your family?" "What about socialization?" "Where do you get your resources?" "Do you plan each day, each month, or yearly?" "What is unschooling?" "What about college?" We use the final 45 minutes for questions from the audience, and we also have a resource table at the back on which we include old copies of GWS and Home Education Magazine, a list of local support groups , a pile of homeschool catalogs, a copy of the state law, and several homeschool books. I fit this all in a box that I use each time. I have another box with water cups and name placards for the panelists and a sign for the door, masking tape, etc. The whole thing packs up easily and I don't have to plan too hard for each panel.

After doing several of these Information Nights, I find that there is almost no planning needed at all. We get about 30-40 people each time and the panelists and the audience get so much out of it. I used to do these events four times a year, but now do them twice yearly and am in the process of trying to pass the job on. In the current set-up, I usually have a partner to help; one of us asks questions, the other attends to the newcomers and kids, etc. Also, I send each panelist an information letter before the panel: please come on time, thanks for doing this, please don't bash the schools, bring any resources you love to use, keep your answers brief, etc. And I always follow up with thank you notes to the panelists.

The second thing I've done to help people find information about homeschooling is to create notebooks for each public library reference section in our area. I first wrote to the head administrator of the county libraries telling her that I wanted to prepare an information notebook and include: questions and answers, a copy of the homeschool law, a list of books and resource catalogs, support groups (both religious and secular), a list of homeschool publications, information about college, county review process, etc. I got the OK, so I purchased 22 inexpensive notebooks (the whole job cost me less than $1 per notebook) and requested information from HEM and GWS and our state home-school group. I typed up a Q & A sheet with the basic questions answered and included that as well.

I gave the completed batch of notebooks to the regional library for cataloging, and they were distributed and put into the computer data base. I do need to update them after a year, but most of the updates are on my computer, such as support group numbers, etc. Now when people call me, I tell them to go to any county library and look up the notebook and if they have any other questions, to call back. I've also recruited some friends who want to serve as contact people and I refer some calls out. And so that I don't even have to answer all the calls that come to me, I recently got an answering machine with two mailboxes, and the answering machine instructs the callers to hit mailbox #2 for homeschool information. Then, it informs the caller about the notebooks and the information night. So this way, I feel as if I'm getting people started out on homeschooling, but still have time with my family.

Homeschooling in the News

[SS:] Many of you saw the 10/5/98 *Newsweek* article about homeschooling, and, judging from the letters published in a subsequent issue and from the comments about it that we received, your reactions were mixed – some thought it was quite a good article, others thought it was an inaccurate portrayal, and others seemed to feel it fell somewhere in between.

Not long afterwards, the *New York Times* published two stories on homeschooling. One, on October 29th, was about homeschoolers' use of online networks and online courses. The other was an article in the Sunday "Education Life" section (November 1st) about grown-up homeschoolers. The piece profiled four grown homeschoolers. I spoke briefly with the writer of this piece when she was doing her research, and from her questions it was clear that she began with the hypothesis that leaving home for college or other pursuits would be a big shock for homeschoolers, who had presumably been quite sheltered up to then. I'm pleased to see that the overall tone of the finished piece is much more positive.

One quote in this piece deserves a further comment. The article describes Tad Heuer, a homeschooler now at Brown University, and mentions some of the activities he pursued as a teenager, including working for a gubernatorial campaign, "impressing the staff so much that he was promoted from making copies to doing research on the opposition." After this description, the article then quotes one of the people who had worked with Tad on that campaign, who says: "My guess would be that homeschoolers would give you pause if they seemed to be a person of average talent ... You'd be thinking, 'Who is this person? What have they done? What do they know?' You'd think to yourself, 'Are they, like, coming out of a cult or something?' But [Tad] is so talented, you think, 'Well, geez, maybe this homeschooling thing is something to consider.'"

This ends up being a positive quote about Tad and, in a way, about homeschooling itself. But what this colleague was saying was that homeschoolers have to be extra talented, extra amazing, just to be taken seriously and avoid being dismissed as coming out of a cult. This is rather like the prejudice blacks and other minorities have faced over the years, in which it's not enough just to be "of average talent," like everyone else; instead, the member of the minority has to prove himself by being way above average. While we can't change this attitude overnight, I think it's helpful to recognize this kind of thinking when we see others responding to homeschoolers that way, and to challenge it if at all possible. For the purposes of assuring others that "this homeschooling thing is something to consider," it shouldn't be necessary to be above average.

Office News

[SS:] Whew! What a whirlwind it's been since our last issue went to press. First there was our conference, which was a lot of fun and a lot of hard work, especially for conference organizer Day Farenga. You'll see Day's report, and some photos from the conference, on the opposite page.

No sooner had we regained our energy from the conference when we had to gear up for moving our offices up the street to a new location. Now that we have outsourced our shipping and subscription fulfillment, so that these parts of our work are being handled from Michigan, we no longer needed such large quarters and were able to move into a smaller and less costly space. We were very happy to find suitable space so close by – among other advantages, we were able to retain our phone number, causing much less disruption. Our thanks go to Holt Associates board member Maureen Carey, who put her real estate savvy to work in finding us new space. Our thanks also go to Day Farenga once more, for doing the lion's share of the work as we attempted to fit our many books, desks, and file cabinets into fewer square feet than we were accustomed to. The Farenga girls – Lauren, Alison, and Audrey – were also a big help measuring furniture. Twelve-year-old Lauren was only 2 when we last moved the office, so that gives you a sense of how long we had been in the previous location.

Though our mail will be forwarded for several months, we appreciate any help you can give in spreading the word of our new address. Many local newsletters, resource guides, and so on print our address, and anything you can do to update this information will be a help to us. Our new mailing address, for correspondence, information requests, GWS submissions, customer service inquiries, etc. is

2380 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 104, Cambridge MA 02140

Our mailing address *for book, subscription, and back issue orders only* is

John Holt's Bookstore, PO Box 8006, Walled Lake, MI 48391-8006

See our catalog in our previous issue, GWS #125, for a complete listing of books we carry and for our current order form.

In the middle of this hectic time, we also brought on board a new Office Administrator. Eliza Packard will be in the office 30 hours a week and will very likely be the person who answers the phone when you call.

Also in the middle of this hectic time, I went on a brief trip to London, speaking at a conference called "Home-based Education: Past, Present, and Future." The conference was organized by Leslie Barson, whose homeschoolers' center, The Otherwise Club, was described in GWS #120. Leslie organized the event in conjunction with the Creativity in Education Community of the Open University. It was great fun to meet British homeschoolers, hear the Educational Heretics Press director Roland Meighan speak about John Holt, hear Education Otherwise's founding member Sarah Guthrie speak about homeschooling in Britain today, hear a panel of grown homeschoolers and note the wonderful similarities between the way they answer those familiar questions and the way our grown homeschoolers do, and finally to speak on the subject of "Does home-schooling prepare kids for real life?" to a very welcoming and receptive audience.

This was the first time any of us from Holt Associates had been invited to speak abroad, but in the coming months we're about to multiply that as Pat Farenga goes to Italy (in late November – next week, as I write) to speak at a meeting about education and training organized by the Nova Spes Foundation, and then goes to England and France in early April. In our last issue, by the way, we said that the English conference at which Pat will be speaking was organized by Education Otherwise, but that was our error. In fact, it's organized by Malcolm Muckle of HE2K-Plus (Home Education for the year 2000 onwards). Malcolm can be reached by email <malcolm@he2k.plus.co.uk>

Report from GWS's 1998 Conference

Our GWS Conference at Eisner Camp the weekend of Sept. 25-27th was filled with panels, talks, discussions, and camp activities. Families came to Great Barrington, Mass. from every northeastern state, plus Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Idaho, and Georgia. We had a mom trek in from Washington State, the distance exceeded only by the mom from France. Another family traveled all the way from England to join us; a few came from Canada. We are so glad to offer conferences that fill the needs of families who find the trip worthwhile.

We took over the whole Eisner Camp, which gave everyone a wonderful sense of community. The highlight for many people was the freedom the children could have on this private acreage, with counselors assisting them on boats, bikes, climbing towers, ropes courses, and more. We heard reports of otherwise clingy children being positively elated by the freedom that this safe space, with so many fun activities, allowed them.

With the children happily and safely active, parents heard many ideas from a variety of speakers. Tips on helping children learn math, reading, science, and writing abounded. Adults enjoyed discussion sessions in which they shared stories on such topics as special needs children, how to stay involved as a homeschooling father, what it means to be a feminist homeschooling mother, and handling doubts. Teens brought forth concerns and gained empowerment in their "What Next?" discussion and in the many spontaneous conversations all weekend.

On the evaluation form, one parent wrote, "My kids had a major ball here – home may be a letdown after this!" Others said, "Mom was in heaven to meet so many other interesting unschool families," and "As a veteran homeschooler, I actually learned something this time." After all the work and planning, we really appreciate your grateful comments, and we also appreciate the specific suggestions that will help us improve future conferences. The only thing that would have improved the weekend is if even more of you were there! — Day Farenga

Kyle Jenkins climbs the Alpine Tower

Susan Evans (fourth from right) took her discussion session outside to enjoy the weather while also enjoying the exchange of ideas and support

Everyone enjoyed the outdoor pool, set in the middle of the camp with the Berkshire mountains in the background

photos by Lucia Jenkins

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Reading the Snow

This essay is by Peter Stillman, familiar to many GWS readers as the author of *Families Writing* and *Write Away.* He is also the Vice-President and Editorial Director of Calendar Islands Publishers.

In at least one Native American tongue, the term for "learning" is also the term for "breath." So that, literally, life and learning are synonymous. This is not only a beautiful concept; it is also a necessary one. When I was out in a tiny Eskimo village on the edge of the Bering Sea one February, a young man died attempting to get to the next village, only five miles away. He became lost in a snow squall and froze to death on the tundra. They found him next to his snow machine. He was wearing a mail-order two-tone parka and Nikes.

But that is not why he died. It was because he didn't know how to read snow, to find deliverance in its swirling script. It is an aspect of science pertinent to survival on the coast of the Bering Sea. His community hadn't failed him, but it could be said that his schooling had, because there was nothing in the curriculum of the village school about reading snow. It is mainly a conventional Anglo curriculum, the national curriculum we don't admit we operate under.

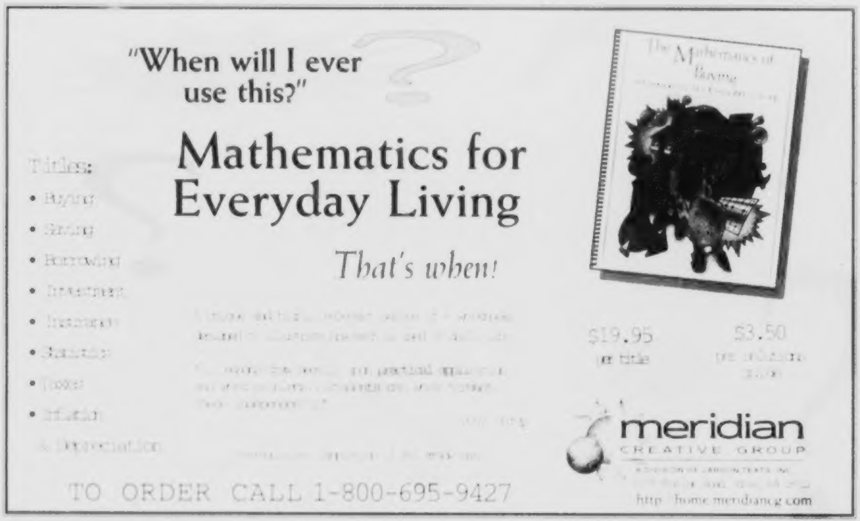
Ironically, in this same tiny village, a powerful shaman, an ancient man, lay on his deathbed. He was so weak that he had to be given water on the tip of a feather. Think of that – to drink from a feather, the wisdom and poetic delicacy of the act. A shaman, a medicine man with magical powers, sustained till the last by this ancient ministration; a young man, a clan member, dead out on the tundra – in Nikes and a flashy parka.

No curriculum should aspire to wean us entirely away from custom, from lore, from a way to read the stars or the snow that will get us safely home again. The best stories – the ones we never forget, the ones we use as teaching stories, with which we moralize – are almost always *localized* apocrypha. They are what the community gives us, a verbalized sense of place. No story can be *wrong*, a comfortably credible notion until we come to the hard ground of application, until we succumb to evidence to the contrary, at which point a story becomes *only* a story. Why, I wonder at my considerable age, do we then invariably give in to *information*? Why do we so glibly honor fact over folklore when the former has betrayed us again and again throughout its brief and infamous history?

The community is not only an ever-renewable source of psychic energy; it is indeed a university of sorts, a place for thought and learning, for the acquisition of skills, for the study of history, art, culture. It should not have taken the *Foxfire* series to make blazingly clear that we often learn best by standing still, on our own ground, by watching, by asking questions, and in the process by learning how to ask, and then by writing our versions in our own words.

I have set kids loose to do this on many occasions – to go into homes and offices and workshops and garages and hospitals and factories and onto construction sites and into the woods with loggers – to watch, to ask, to sketch, to photograph, to write – and they and I have learned, I no less than they, and they have published what we learned. We can *prepare* for life in classrooms, but we cannot study it close at hand. We can *read* about life in textbooks and never realize that we are, even and especially as children, its essence.

It should not have taken a Studs Terkel to inspire us to put kids to interviewing people in the community – to discover close at hand not only what people do but how they feel about work, about themselves, about their particular worlds. In long years as a teacher, I've never been more fascinated by what students discovered this way – by their finding out about *work*, standing in the din of it, smelling hot oil, sweat, manure, sawdust; and I have never felt better about being a teacher than when kids began making huge conceptual leaps of understanding about what it is like to be human – why it is so beautiful and miserable at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once.

Yes, we can bring community resources into the school in the way of speakers, artists and artisans, people from business and industry, and indeed we should. But it is not the same, is it? It is decontextualized, ungrounded, a demonstration, a display of components. More than we realize, it is *context* that we learn from, not the purported *matter* of a lesson. You cannot build anything lasting unless you know the ground from which it will rise.

To know. There is a point in teaching – perhaps in life itself – where much of what we think we know reveals itself as mere dogma, and we are suddenly confounded by the sense that we cannot possibly comprehend our own species – what is best for it, how it learns, what it should be taught, what finally it should *know*. Teaching, unlike most other trades, does not begin as mystery; it becomes mystery.

I think about the Manhattan parking lot attendant in Terkel's book *Working*, how he had found in this lowly job a pride and a beauty. He was utterly without doubt about his skill; it was what he knew, and it sustained him. I'm not sure to this day whether or not the simulation I designed for my students resulted in the kinds of learning that sustained any of them. It was a lesson in survival in a region strange to many of them, a rugged land of poverty and harsh winters. The project is too elaborate to detail here, beyond saying that each student was given a 5-acre patch of land and $1500, with the challenge to live there unsubsidized through three seasons, including a brutal winter. Those kids, 9th and 10th graders, exhausted virtually every resource in the community determining how to get by. Some went so far as to actually construct a yurt; others demonstrated the preparation of foods available in the wild; some spend weekends camping in the woods.

Students designed water systems, food storage facilities. The room filled up with catalogs, classified sections from area papers, brochures, actual tools and implements. And all the while they kept journals, reporting on daily progress and about life on the land.

Nothing they learned came out of textbooks or from me. It came from the community – from shopkeepers, farmers, hunters and trappers, conservation personnel, carpenters, mechanics, even a gunsmith. It was, literally, a thrilling project for most of them. It became real, not a simulation. I suppose it took too long. And it was difficult to justify, coming as it did out of the English department. Worst of all, it was unassessable in any formal sense. The only assessment was in fact imposed by peers: did this particular student make it through the winter or not? Each kid's efforts came down to whether he or she lived or died out there.

I can't say with certainty what those kids learned, only that they came away from the experience, most of them, knowing *something*, knowing that they had designed the learning of that something, and sensing that that something was important. ◆

THE COUNTRY SCHOOL
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The geographic location of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan may account for its unique history. Its sparse human population, abundant wetlands and uninterrupted needleleaf and hardwood forests result in a biological complexity which provides some of the most varied habitat in the U.S. Warm glacial lakes are found everywhere across the peninsula. It was in Luce County, near McMillan, next to one of these bodies of water in 1989 that we found and established our 40 acre outfitting center. Aboriginal peoples moved across this area as hunters and nomads for millions of years. The dense forest dictated that the waterways, the lakes and rivers, were to be the main thoroughfares. Canoes of all sizes were the commonest modes of travel for the indigenous peoples as well as for the French and British voyageurs of recent times seeking trade routes.

The Voyageur Experience invites young adults or families to traverse trail, lake, and river in eight day journeys recalling the travels of these earlier peoples. Participants will not only relive an historical process but also absorb low-impact, safe wilderness camping, canoeing and kayaking skills. These expeditions are small, personally managed adventures based on the understanding that humanity has spent most of its time on earth in close contact with the natural world. We are committed to reconnecting people with these roots.

YOUR GUIDE: BEN BARKER
Ben has been working with children and families in outdoor education and guiding his entire life, first at the Ohio farm program, then, after 1989, in Michigan's upper peninsula, the Idaho and Montana Rockies and Arizona canyons. He has spent over a thousand days in the out of doors guiding. He is not only trained in the Montessori approach by his parents but also has certification as an Emergency Medical Technician and Wilderness First

Responder and from the National Outdoor Leadership School, Outward Bound and Whitewater Specialty. His wilderness safety record is spotless.
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Challenges & Concerns

Access to School Activities: Negotiating Policy

Ruth Matilsky (NJ) wrote earlier this year:

Our school board is rethinking their homeschooling policy and is in the process of drawing up a written policy concerning homeschoolers. I first heard of this when I tried to sign my son Jake up for driver's ed and was told that no homeschoolers can take classes until the new policy is set. (In the past, homeschoolers have been able to participate in school activities fairly easily; our older daughter took choir and drama for a year.)

I have gotten people to write letters and attend board meetings in order to convince the board and the curriculum committee that they should talk to homeschooling parents about a policy that will concern our children. My biggest concern was that I didn't know where the school board members were coming from: I didn't know whether they were just drawing up a formal structure to follow when signing homeschoolers up for classes or whether they were planning to say that in the future homeschoolers *couldn't* attend classes.

At the board meeting I attended, where I tried to ask this question, I was told to feel free to give all the input I wanted. When I kept saying that I wanted feedback – that I wanted to understand what their concerns were – one of the curriculum committee members said, "Oh, you can tell us what you think, but we don't have a *dialogue*." When I said I thought a dialogue would be a good idea, one of the Board members finally said, "Why *not* have a dialogue?" Hooray! The curriculum committee member who had originally said "no dialogue" got totally flustered at this point but indicated that she would talk to the other members about it.

In fact, Jake does not particularly want to take Driver's Ed at the school, and is only doing it for the discount on his insurance. Then when I told him that the worst that could happen would be that he enroll in school as a full-time student for six weeks and take Driver's Ed along with all the other courses, he thought about it, figured out how much earnings he would lose if he gave up his various jobs to enroll in school, and decided that what he would save on insurance might not be worth it.

All that aside, I think this brings up all kinds of issues. Philosophically, the Board of Education of a town should care about the education of all its residents. We are all affected by other people's actions. How Jake drives should be of concern to everyone. If one believes that the 40 hours that are required for a discount on the insurance are valuable then wouldn't it stand to reason that one would want all potential drivers in that class?

It seems to me that school's resources should be available to the community at large. The idea of education has broadened so much. School used to mean academic subjects. Now the schools put on plays for which large royalties must be paid and expensive costumes used. Wouldn't it be better to use that money for an arts program for the entire community? Sports is another issue. The Interscholastic Athletic Association has said that any school that uses homeschoolers to compete on a team will be disqualified. I pondered this and wondered whether it should be fought. Then I started thinking about the nature of competitive high school sports. Only a small minority of kids get to play on those teams. Wouldn't it be better to use the money to create a more all-encompassing intra-mural program for everyone in the community?

I've been told that homeschoolers are elitists because we are not involved in public education. In actuality the schools promote elitism when they don't let homeschooled kids participate. Families like ours can afford to pay for private lessons for all kinds of things, but people with lower incomes might think twice about homeschooling from an economic point of view. I know people who are so committed to homeschooling that they find ways to provide what their kids need, even if their income is low. But there are others who are not as convinced at the beginning that homeschooling is the right path, and if money is an issue, some will never do it. For those people it would be very useful to have the school's science classes and theater programs open to homeschoolers.

In a letter that the curriculum committee sent to homeschoolers, they mentioned that they are worried about the impact on the school budget if more and more homeschoolers take advantage of the schools. While it is true that we have a lot of people homeschooling in this town, if you were to figure out how many homeschoolers there are at each age level, you would find only a few in each grade, and none in some. In addition, as more homeschoolers leave the school system, others return.

A week later, Ruth wrote:

We met with the Curriculum Committee and they presented several silly reasons why it would be difficult to include homeschoolers in classes and after-school activities. The reasons were so silly, I don't want to waste time by writing them. Clearly, if they wanted to do it, they could. I got the feeling that one woman in particular just hates our guts for homeschooling. At the end of the meeting, she smirked and said, "Well, if you want your children to take a class, all you have to do is enroll the child in school for a year. They might enjoy it."

I later found out that this woman had a learning disabled child who couldn't get the help she needed in school, so she took her daughter out and put her in a private school for several years. Her feeling is that if people don't like the public schools, they should suffer and pay what it costs for private school, as she did.

Meanwhile, another homeschooling group in New Jersey has pooled resources and is renting a church for several hours one day a week and is calling it a resource center. There is a gymnasium and an outdoor field for soccer and lots of little rooms inside as well as one big room for art activities and play rehearsals. It's a wonderful thing. I am willing to drive 45 minutes each week so my kids can be part of this. Unfortunately, we will be looking for another space because the church will no longer be available.

And a few months later, Ruth wrote:

The Board of Education came out with a homeschooling policy in which they said we could have access to textbooks, and homeschoolers in grades 9-12 can take one class a year and participate in extra-curricular activities. The policy is OK, but it does exclude younger children. This after years of allowing younger homeschoolers to take classes. I got together with a friend and wrote a strongly worded letter urging them to amend the policy to include middle school children. I pointed out that so far they have not been deluged with requests and that in fact most homeschoolers don't have the time or the inclination to attend a school class. I said that forcing a child who wants to take one class to attend full time is counterproductive if that child is thriving in the homeschool environment and that excluding children discriminates against families who cannot afford science equipment or private tutors.

Much to my surprise, I received a call from a School Board official who told me they were very surprised to get my letter because they thought their policy was so inclusive. I spoke to her a while and was even more surprised later to get a second phone call in which she said that they were considering allowing the middle school students to participate in extra-curricular activities. Soon afterward, I learned that they voted to include the middle school students. I don't think we can push for more; they say they are open to reviewing the policy next year. Meanwhile, I am gratified by the power of the pen.

Online Community *is* Beneficial

Nicky Hardenbergh (MA) writes:

I'll be frank. The headline, "Should Homeschoolers Use the Internet?" and the article which prompted it, "Homeschoolers Online? Not So Fast" (GWS #124) really annoyed me. The authors, Matt Hern and Stu Chaulk, depict a state of affairs that is almost totally unconnected to my own experience as a long-time homeschool parent and as a contented member of the homeschool online community. I would be dismayed if any homeschoolers uncritically accepted the authors' analysis.

I wish, first of all, that the authors had not used the term homeschool "movement." "Movement" implies an organized group working toward a common goal. The authors appear unaware of the vast political, social, economic, and religious differences within the homeschooling community. Instead, they treat homeschoolers as an undiverse population, a population that the authors would like to use to promote their own particular vision of social transformation through "school resistance."

In their eagerness to achieve that vision, they are impatient with homeschoolers who might be relegating "social concerns to a place far behind personal interests." The authors disparage the desires of parents to find the best educational experience for their children, terming such motivation "individual opportunism." I find this a bizarre comment. In my experience, few people begin homeschooling in order to make a political statement. We simply, and quite reasonably, wish the best for our children. The very process of homeschooling itself begins to transform our old ideas and conceptions. As we see our children thrive outside of educational institutions, we become motivated to work to help insure that homeschooling remains a viable option for any who choose it. (And we often use electronic communication in order to organize politically.) As those around us see the successes homeschooling brings to our families, some are encouraged to try homeschooling themselves. In this organic way, homeschoolers constantly induce social transformation.

As to the authors' main argument, that "the rise of the net necessarily means a loss of community," I am dumbfounded. I would like to know if Hern and Chaulk have any firsthand acquaintance with homeschooling and with the online homeschool community. Their description of "virtuality" does not match my experience online at all. My participation in the homeschool online community in no way detracts from my participation in my geographic community. I can't, as the authors urge, "consider what [my online community] replaces." It replaces a total void.

I could not have gained the benefit of the wisdom of more seasoned homeschool moms in my geographic community; there are no homeschool moms with more experience within miles of here. Nor could I help homeschooling novices much in my geographic community; homeschoolers are rare. Yet I can help homeschoolers across the country through online connections. Learning to be a more effective homeschool mom is a very specialized area of expertise; we need all the help we can get. The online community permits homeschoolers throughout the country to act as a support and resource for each other. In fact, we are fostering Hern and Chaulk's stated goal of having families learn to "shape and build their own lives rather than have bureaucracies and professionals do it for them." I can't imagine that Hern and Chaulk could be aware of the tremendous exchange of ideas and sustenance that occurs on internet homeschool lists and on the AOL Home Education Magazine Forum, for

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I hasten to concur with the authors about potential dangers of the internet. It is a challenge to learn how to blend this technology, which could easily consume enormous amounts of time, with other aspects of my life. But in no way have I "stopped going to libraries," as the authors suggest. And the notion that I have stopped writing letters is laughable. Previously, I was more likely to telephone rather than write a letter. I stay in much closer touch with friends and family now that I am online.

The authors' concern that homeschooling might become another "elite privilege" strikes me as particularly unfounded. Most homeschool families live on one income, and often a small income. They are not an elite group economically, and certainly there is no danger of the majority of homeschoolers' becoming "yuppified."

I fully support the proposition that we must all be discriminating in our use of technology; certainly, there are dangers and limits to online technology. Hern and Chaulk, however, only seem to put forward facile and unsubstantiated arguments, rather than to provide any genuine service to homeschoolers.

Getting In, Getting Out

Penny Barker (OH) writes:

Because so many of our friends were shocked when one of our children chose to enter the U.S. Marine Corps, I began to think about it myself. Since all five of my children follow their own drummers, I'm never too surprised by them. Initially, I'm sometimes puzzled by some of their choices, but it doesn't take long for me to realize that I've allowed them to have their own ideas and views and that their actions will follow suit. So when Jonah told me a year ago last September that he was going to a nearby town to talk to the Navy Recruiter, I thought of it as one of his many explorations. As he began to get his father Richard and me involved in the process of supplying high school credentials, etc., I realized that he was moving forward with action. I did advise him that though it was his choice (at 19, he didn't need our permission to enlist), once he was in, it would be a pretty solid arrangement for the next four years so he should be sure it was what he wanted to do.

Andrew Hill wrote in GWS #119 about not being able to get into a branch of the military without a diploma from a high school recognized by their organization. The same thing happened to Jonah. When he said he was homeschooled, the Navy Recruiter just couldn't work it through their system. So Jonah tried another branch of the service. He spoke to the Marine Recruiter, and with help from Pat Montgomery of the Clonlara Home Based Education Program explaining Jonah's Clonlara diploma, Jonah was accepted into the Corps. Things moved quickly then, and within the month, a car with his Recruiter in it had driven out to our farm and whisked Jonah away for "processing."

We didn't see him again for three months, though we sure got a lot of letters since telephone use is not allowed in Boot Camp. I think this period gave a real boost to Jonah's letter-writing skills! We were also able to see a sentimental, family-attached side of him that is not obvious most of the time. It was tough in Boot Camp, but Jonah was prepared for that and managed to get through the grueling 12 weeks. After that, he got a 10-day leave before going on to his next phase of training.

He was very happy to be home but seemed preoccupied and somehow nervous. All he could think of was having everything perfect for his next training camp – everything had to be folded or ironed or rolled in a very particular way or *big trouble*. I figured this was good discipline for Jonah and I wasn't bothered by it. But when I read his orders and realized that he would be going off to Infantry school, I wasn't happy since I knew that Infantry had been the thing he had told his Recruiter he did *not* want. I realized that in an effort to meet his recuit quota, the Recruiter had railroaded Jonah through quickly and, as he told me *after* Jonah was in, "At the end of the fiscal year for the military, there aren't many jobs left to choose from." He further told me that Jonah should have gone in with "delayed entry" and he could then have been assured of his choice of jobs. "You're a little late with this information," I winced to myself when I heard this.

When Jonah got to Infantry School, he found out that he would be learning to be a machine-gun carrier! Well, what did Jonah expect when he signed up? What did I expect? Jonah was unexposed to TV or films as a child and then became a regular movie goer at age 15. In hindsight, I think he was influenced strongly by the romantic picture portrayed of the military in many cinematic stories. As for my expectations, I plead guilty to lack of clarity in thinking at the time Jonah was enlisting. It was the end of an intensely busy summer and I hadn't yet had the quiescent time I need to shift from The Country School (our summer program) to my rest-of-the-year life with my family.

Jonah wanted out; he felt he'd been misled and misinformed. He told me he was exposed to more smoking, drinking, and drugs than ever before in his life. He said he could handle it but it was indicative of how grueling and boring the days were; it was the only way the men got through. I realized at this point that Jonah had gotten himself into something that was not a match for him.

Everyone I talked to who had had anything to do with the military indicated that for Jonah to obtain a discharge would be next to impossible. I only allowed myself to hear "next to," not "impossible." My brother in Arizona told me of a friend of his who had gotten out of the Marines during Boot Camp. I finally got ahold of this man, and he said his son had gotten a dishonorable discharge that had hindered the boy's ability to get into some other things he'd wanted to pursue. (This boy had found Boot Camp so unbearable that he'd gone UL – unauthorized liberty – and had to return to Parris Island with a lawyer to keep from going into the brig, the military prison.) I knew Jonah didn't want to go that route, but I was also aware that he badly wanted to leave.

Feeling a little desperate at this point, I called my Congressman and Pat Montgomery. Pat Montgomery has helped my children (and tons of others) through their growing up years, usually helping them get *in* to something (as she had earlier with Jonah). But now we wanted help with getting him out. Without one word of surprise, without a "tsk-tsk," Pat got to work, contacted some folks she knew in the military, and came back with the information that Jonah's first step should be to talk to the Base Chaplain. Pat's "let's get going" attitude picked me up and gave me the frame of mind I needed to work on Jonah's situation.

When I spoke with my Congressman, he was sympathetic but said that once he got involved, the Marines might get tougher with Jonah. Indication of work on Jonah's part *outside* the Marine Corps chain of command would be frowned upon. Since I was now able to speak with Jonah by telephone occasionally, I could ask him if he did want the Congressman to get involved. When he said "yep," I gave the Congressman the go-ahead.

Meanwhile, Jonah began to work on his discharge from inside. It meant days spent waiting to see this person

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and that, until he finally was assigned to MAT Co. (Marines Awaiting Training). There were about 450 young men (and women I think) in this company who were not continuing with their training for one reason or another: waiting for injuries to heal, under suicide watch, awaiting discharge, etc. It wasn't a good place to be, but Jonah knew it was a necessary step in his getting an honorable discharge. Over the next two months, he spoke to officers in the chain of command, psychologists, and medical doctors, and did lots more waiting.

Finally, after much in-your-face berating from officers in command, he was given his last medical examination, given a bus ticket, and told he was leaving the next day, with his honorable discharge papers to follow in a month, during which time, if war broke out and U.S. forces were involved, his discharge would be void. As of this writing, Jonah has been out of the Marines for five months, none the worse for the experience and pleased with himself for completing the Boot Camp ordeal.

Should Jonah have finished his commitment? I decided that in this case it was like a book. Growing up, if the children chose a book from the library, began reading it and did not especially like it, they were not compelled to finish it. Perhaps this is rationalization. I don't feel that quitting when things get rough is an especially admirable idea. But neither do I feel that my children should stick to a situation that makes them truly unhappy, just for the sake of sticking it out. I suppose the deciding factor for me is in what is experienced as truly unhappy. Since this is going to be different for every one of my kids, I can't make a rule that will cover every case.

In GWS #118, I wrote about my older son Dan's attendance at a conservatory and how I see it affecting him. What I am having to face is that what Neil Postman would call the "monastery environment" in which my kids were raised is not going to exist once they leave home. They will adjust, and have adjusted, to other environments. The choice is to decide which environments offer enough strengths to outweigh the weaknesses. I realize that I can listen to them talk about the costs and benefits of their choices and can even offer my own opinion. Ultimately, however, they make their own decisions, as Dan did when he decided to complete his degree at Oberlin Conservatory. I may have felt the environment spiritually too costly, but I am not Dan; I am very much aware of this.

I've found that, even though our children are grown, they like to keep in touch with us and to bounce their ideas and plans off our experience and wisdom. But they do not like for us to be adamant (either pro or con) about their choices. We respect this and have adopted a somewhat dispassionate (though not uncaring) approach. For most of the year, they live away from us, with several of the five returning home each summer to run The Country School with us. Britt, the oldest at 30, calls home less frequently than Jonah, the youngest at 20. I also notice that their communication with home is more frequent when things in

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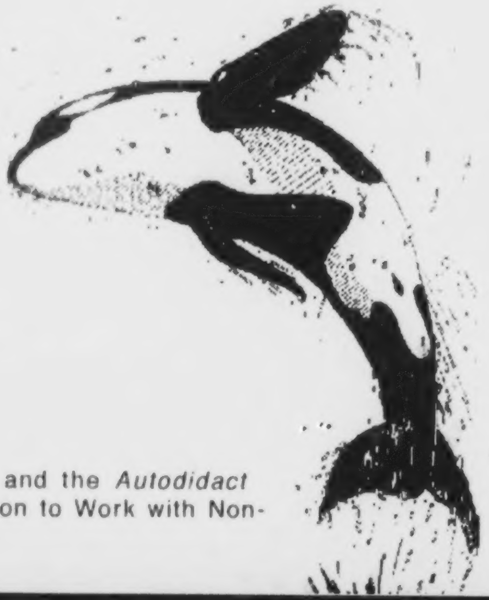

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their lives are disturbing than when their lives are sailing along. Richard and I accept our role in their adult lives, of being here when they need us. The love and trust developed during those "learning together" years is solid, and it is all we need to know in order to know it was been worth it, even with the bumps.

Supportive Grandparents

Penny Ward Marcus of Massachusetts writes:

We are that mythical family you were looking for in GWS #125, with "Grandparents and other relatives and family friends who *do* support homeschooling, or who were once skeptical but have become supportive." Guilty on all charges. I am hoping you will hear from others, because it seems like our experience has not been the norm for homeschooling families in the past, but I suspect others are seeing the changes as we are.

Our decision to homeschool our daughter Abby was initially met with severe doubts from my in-laws. When we asked for their opinions about the option, they came to us with reasons that it would be a disaster. We thanked them for their efforts and then went ahead and based our decision on what we had learned about homeschooling from a lot of research and from knowing others who had been homeschooling for years. When we told my in-laws we were going to give it a try, they agreed to support our decision from that point on, but it was clear that they had reservations. We took Abby out of school in the middle of third grade and never looked back. My husband's parents were sure she would be in private school by the next fall.

Within four weeks, Abby was coming out of a three-and-a-half-year funk. She was once again the happy, curious, loving child that I hadn't seen much of since her first day of kindergarten. Her grandparents couldn't help but notice the change. After the first month, my husband Ed's father came to us and apologized for their initial reaction. They were completely converted. "This is the best thing you've ever done," were his very words. I was relieved, because I had envisioned a long process of justifying and explaining our daily lives. Abby is their only grandchild, and if they thought for an instant that we were compromising her education, we would hear about it, loud and clear. These days, Grandpa loves to read news about homeschooling on the Internet, and Grandma makes it a point to find as many interesting books for Abby as possible. They are available to help when we need it as chauffeurs, sitters, and even teachers. Ed's 93-year-old grandmother even supports the idea of homeschooling. She doesn't really understand how it works, but she remembers a time when not everyone went to school. It isn't a *new* idea that people can learn on their own. There is curiosity on the part of Ed's brother, aunts, and uncles, but I can't recall any criticism.

My family was *less* of a trial. Mom was the first to suggest homeschooling Abby. "Why don't you homeschool her?" she said. "You're both intelligent and educated. You would probably do a better job than any school." This came when Abby was in first grade! We didn't even consider Mom's advice until it was clear there was no way to fix the gap between what school is and what Abby needed.

My mother was thrilled (she had been listening to my griping about school for some time). Not one member of my family has expressed any doubt about the choice. Once again, curiosity over details shows up – the usual questions about legal procedures and how we choose what to do. When we visited my family in Washington State during Abby's first year of freedom, my sister and her husband were impressed with the change in her behavior and attitude. They both said it was clear that she was doing much better than the last time they had seen us. My three brothers just take it for granted that we know best and they don't see anything at all strange in what we do. My cadre of aunts feel pretty much the same.

Even outside the family we have had support. Our closest friends expressed only surprise that we didn't put Abby into private school (their kids have been tucked away in private

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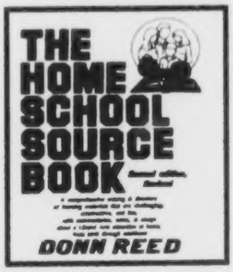

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schools from the beginning). But there has been a growing acceptance of the rightness of homeschooling for us, and while it isn't what they would choose, they have a considerable interest in how we go about it. As well, Abby's private instructors and coaches noticed a change for the better before we even got around to telling them she had left school. Only one person didn't really understand the concept but was glad it was working anyway.

So you don't think that I live on another planet entirely, let me say that I *have* met with some people who think that school is a necessity, that we are depriving Abby of something that will be horribly apparent in the future. I haven't been able to find a clear definition of exactly what that thing is, but no matter; there are people who feel very strongly about it. Because I have strong support and acceptance from family and friends, as well as the contacts made through several homeschooling groups, I don't feel like I have to convert anyone.

This also explains a recent conversation I had with other homeschooling parents. One was saying how much she enjoyed being with other homeschooling parents so she could relax and stop feeling like she was a revolutionary for a while. When I reacted by blurting, "I don't feel like what we do is revolutionary at all," most of the other parents were surprised. Many had started homeschooling long before we did. I think public acceptance of homeschooling has grown enormously in the last few years, and my family has definitely reaped the benefits. I thank GWS in part, and those families who bucked public opinion in the past decades. Most of all I thank the people who are open-minded enough to realize that school, which works for many, may be poison for some. I appreciate my family's support and the support of our friends beyond words. I hope that others who are currently at odds with family and friends can resolve their problems and finally relax a little more often!

Part-Time Work Supports Other Activities

Mae Shell (VT) writes:

I have been very interested to see the discussion recently in GWS regarding whether or not is possible to find work that one loves. I was especially struck by Lindsey Johnson's piece in GWS #125, because the idea of not "submitting" by getting a job that's boring is something I've struggled with myself this past year. Right now, I work part time (18 hours per week) at a local library. I've been employed there for three years – I started out at the age of 16 volunteering, was offered temp work, and then finally got a permanent position. For a while, I really loved being at the library, and even considered a career in library science. But, not too long after accepting a paid position I began to experience the feeling of having to do certain things at certain times, whether or not I felt like it. Being a lifelong unschooler, I had really never faced this reality before. Gradually, it got to me more and more, and made me dissatisfied with my job. For a long time, I thought I was unhappy because I didn't like the work I was doing; really, it was because I *had* to do it that dissatisfaction crept in. I realize now that no job is ever completely free of that.

I've always liked playing around on computers and designing things. One year ago, somewhat on a whim, I came to the decision that I wanted to start my own business designing web pages. I thought this would be exciting and it would allow me to break free of my boredom at the library. I gave myself a year to start the business and get it going before quitting my job at the library. Well, it is a year later now, and I am still working at the library, am happy there, and have decided that I don't want to run a web design business. What happened during those twelve months to so turn around my outlook? Well...

I really made an effort to figure out why I no longer liked my job at the library, and if there was anything I could do to change how I felt. As I've said, I realized that my dissatisfaction didn't come from boredom as much as from the feeling of having to do that job. I then understood that designing web pages would be no different if I had to do it. Suddenly, the idea of being self-employed became frightening. I started to cling to my job at the library, listing in my head all the good things about it. I began to wonder if I was just lazy and in a rut since I couldn't stand the thought of casting out on my own.

Finally, I got it: I would have to keep some kind of job to survive as an adult. Being self-employed would mean uncertainty, which I realized is far different from exhilaration and excitement. So, I kept my job at the library. After a few months, I found that my attitude towards it had changed again. I was actually enjoying it once more – not all the time, but enough to find it satisfying. This was an amazing turn-around, and has really made an impression on me about the power of attitude. Having found peace of mind with my library job, I was able to see how web/graphic design is really an extension of the other artistic things I do (like writing poetry or taking photographs), and somehow the idea of being paid to do it didn't appeal to me. I'm very stubborn when it comes to anyone telling me how I should do something artistic. Designing web pages for other people would take the fun out of it for me. I decided that I wanted working on the computer to be a creative outlet, not a job.

I'm still bored with my job at the library from time to time. However, like any adult, I do have bills to pay

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each month (phone, Internet, car payments). Continuing to live at home cuts out the rent issue (I pay that with time instead of money). But even without rent, I'm still living in a culture where money is necessary. To get money, a job is necessary, and I feel lucky to have one that fits me so well (minimal hours, close to home, etc.). When I get bored, it's easy to remind myself that I could easily get a full time job about 30 minutes away from home as a computer technical support person, earn wads of money, and have my own apartment. That cheers me right up, because I know living such a lifestyle would render me lonely and miserable, with no time or energy left over to do the things I love.

So, do I think it is possible for someone to do paid work they love? Maybe for some people it is. For me, it has been necessary to strike a compromise: doing part-time work I like gives me the resources and time to do the things I love. I've found that happiness is not so much a matter of being inspired every single moment (which is probably impossible) but spending the majority of my time on things that give me joy and satisfaction.

OK to Have One Special Friend

Anne Hodge (NY) writes:

On reading Yvonne Garson's "OK Not to Be Social" (GWS #125), I was reminded of my daughter Emily's experience in nursery school. On her first day she met Katherine, a painfully shy girl, and they became fast friends. Emily would wait outside the door so she could arrive with Katherine, and they always chose each other as buddies. Katherine's mother told me how grateful she was that her daughter had made such a good friend.

The teacher, on the other hand, did not think this relationship was a good thing. In fact, she began separating the girls so that they could "make other friends." Emily and Katherine obliged as best as 4-year-olds could but ultimately they were miserable, and I found myself at my first parent-teacher conference. Both Katherine's mother and I told the teacher that we were happy to have our daughters develop such a close friendship. Had any other children complained of feeling left out, we asked? No. Could she just let them be together? Well, yes. But in fact she couldn't, and the rest of the year was tense.

The next time I met with the teacher was to tell her that we had decided to homeschool the next year. Her concern, of course, was socialization. I shared with her the words of Katherine's mother: we meet many people throughout our lives, but few of us are lucky enough to have a true friend.

I am glad to be reminded of this at a time when my children are eager to be everywhere at once. Sure, socialization is important. We tend to forget, though, that time for ourselves or for that one special friend is important too. And sometimes harder to find. ◆

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Why Mentors Love Mentoring

GWS often prints stories about homeschoolers who volunteer at adult workplaces or connect with adult mentors in some other way. It's clear that these are valuable experiences for the young people, but what's in it for the mentors? We asked three adults who mentor homeschoolers (in very different fields) to tell us what they get out of the experience.

Studying Bald Eagles with a Biologist

From Angie Hodgson of Alaska:

I work for a national conservation group called the Wildlife Conservation Society, and they gave me a grant to go to Southeast Alaska because they wanted to support a project there. I came up with a project of studying bald eagles in Haines. Haines is the site of the world's largest congregation of eagles; they call it "Valley of the Eagle." People had questions about the management of the eagles in the area. Although there is a bald eagle preserve there, which was created 16 years ago to safeguard this population of eagles, there hadn't been any intensive biology work done, just the occasional survey. Because the preserve was starting to be used in commercial ways as well, some people wondered about the consequences of running these commercial tours through the preserve. How did this increased human activity affect the eagles? I designed a project that would look at this question and would also do some basic research into where the nests were, how many eagles were using the nests, how much success they were having raising their young.

When I came to Haines and began the project, the local newspaper wrote an article about me and my work. Caitlin Stern, a 14-year-old homeschooler living in Haines, read that article and said to her mother, "That's something I'd be interested in; I'd love to help out with that project." Soon afterward, I happened to run into Caitlin's mother and she told me about Caitlin's interest in helping me. I was a little bit overwhelmed by the idea at first, because I was just in the process of designing a new project and furthermore I'd never worked with anyone that young. I'd had field assistants, but they had always been older and had already gotten BA's in biology. Still, I said "I'd love to have her help me," because one of my goals in my work is to reach as many people as I can. I told Caitlin's mother that I didn't know right offhand what I could do with Caitlin but that it would be a great opportunity for me to figure out how to include somebody her age.

I went home and thought about what Caitlin might be able to do. Biology can often be very technical, and I didn't want to start her off with something boring. It was also hard to think of how to include someone who was just starting to learn, as opposed to someone who already had a lot of experience.

There were a few different aspects to the project I had designed. One was to locate the nests and then, once the eagles started breeding, to watch the nests. I had already hired field assistants to do that, so I couldn't see a place for Caitlin there. But I knew that once a week I was going to be going through the preserve and surveying the birds who were using the aquatic habitats. I had a route set up which involved stopping at 30 different places and counting the number of eagles, ravens, and waterfowl there to get an idea of what type of habitat they needed at different times of the year and to understand how fish affect bird numbers (different fish come at different times of the year, and I wanted to see how many of the birds were really dependent on particular fish). By the time Caitlin's mother approached me, I had already done this route a couple of times by myself, and it was hard to do alone. You're scanning for the birds, trying to remember how many you've counted, and writing it down, all at once. I realized that this was something I needed help with and I thought it would probably be interesting to her as well.

It worked out wonderfully, right from the beginning. Caitlin would help me spot birds as we were driving, and then once we got to the assigned places, I was able to scan and count and read off the numbers, and Caitlin kept track of everything, including the time and the weather on each day. Toward the end of the summer, she began coming along with me on raft trips too. This was another part of the project: in trying to assess the effect of the commercial tours, one thing I did was ride on a raft trip once a week, count the birds, and see how they reacted to boats coming by. When Caitlin came along she helped to collect the data.

I was surprised and happy at how quickly Caitlin learned everything and how accurately she recorded the data. She was completely up to the task I was giving her. As I said, this was my first experience working with a teenager, and I hadn't known for sure that a teenager would be interested in the work I do. It was rewarding to be able to expose someone to what I do and it was fun to have her out there with me because she was always excited – she loved to see the young in the nests, for example. It was neat to see that level of interest and to know that this wasn't something her mom was telling her she had to do; it was her idea.

Knowing that Caitlin would be with me actually helped me to keep up my own interest and enthusiasm. When you're doing this kind of thing week after week, some days you wake up and think, "I don't want to do this." Knowing Caitlin would be there motivated me and reminded me that the task was meaningful and necessary.

It was also interesting to have Caitlin ask me questions or make observations about what we were doing. We spent all day together, and because we had to drive from one spot to another, we had a lot of time in the truck when we talked about things. I tried to explain some of the theory behind the tasks we were doing. After a couple of weeks of that, she began to ask her own questions or to notice things on her own. It was clear that she was learning and picking up on things, and that was neat to see. And I think when you have to explain something to someone else, you have to have it real clear in your own mind; you have to be sure of what you're saying. Instead of just being by myself as I went along this route, I had a sounding board to bounce off ideas.

The experience of working with Caitlin has definitely opened my mind to exploring the possibility of working with more young people. I think a lot of adults are scared of teenagers – you hear so many bad stories – but seeing how great it was with this one teenager makes a difference. It's given me more confidence to work with kids.

Working with a Computer Programmer

From Max Rivers of Massachusetts:

I make my living working as a computer programmer, doing medical robotics programming. The "robots" are machines that are controlled by computers that move things in the physical world. They do things like dispensing pills, extracting samples from test tubes, and so on. More and more medical procedures, like examining blood samples for DNA, are being processed by these kinds of machines. These "robots" process samples so quickly and produce so much more information than can be done by hand that only computers can keep up with them. So I write software that either controls the robots or analyzes the data they produce or both. I work from home for laboratories and hospitals all around the world.

After doing this work for twenty years, I feel I've reached a certain level of mastery. One of the reasons I was happy to take on a student was that it has given me a chance to share what I've learned. As is the case with a lot of jobs, the real art and mastery of my work never gets seen by anyone but me. My customers use the end product, but they don't get to see how I actually solved the problems that came up in the process of creating the software – which is where my twenty years of experience really comes into play. Occasionally I'll write articles about a particularly clever trick I've discovered, or, even more rarely, another programmer will look over my shoulder, but there has been no way to share my work *process* with anyone. And since, as with most adults, my work life is where I spend the vast majority of my time, getting a chance to share this part of my life with the next generation is a real treat for me.

Tibet Sprague was a young man whom I'd known and whom I'd helped periodically, just by answering a few of his computer questions now and then. Tibet and his family decided to homeschool when he was in junior high school. In some areas, like computer science, Tibet is capable of learning much faster than most kids. I identified with that. I have a similar aptitude in math (they didn't have computers when I was in junior high) and although I was fortunate in that I found some really great teachers who essentially taught me everything I learned in school, I spent the whole rest of those 12 years just being patient and bored.

The opportunity to mentor someone in the way that I wish I had been taught is very healing to me. It closes the book on something that has felt unfinished in my life.

Tibet is very motivated and self-directed, and, like me, he loves learning. One of the reasons I picked the computer field is because it's an area where the learning never stops. There's always something new, always more you can learn, so it's continually interesting and challenging.

So when Tibet and his parents came to me and asked if I would be willing to tutor him in computer science, I jumped at the chance. It gave me the opportunity to offer something that I had needed when I was his age. It's true that, as I said, I found a very small number of really good teachers over the years, but to get the kind of help I wanted I had to go in after school, and a lot of it I simply had to do on my own or with other kids. So the opportunity to mentor someone in the way that I wish I had been taught is very healing to me. It closes the book on something that has felt unfinished in my life.

I remember Richard, a friend I had in the sixth grade, Richard could read 1000 words a minute. The first day of class, the teacher handed out the textbooks and we spent the morning writing our names in them and making book covers. In that time, Richard read all the textbooks from beginning to end. He then proceeded to be so bored for the rest of the year that each morning he filled his desk with books, and he would spend the day with his head inside the desk reading those books. Instead of recognizing his special abilities, the teacher was continually punishing him for not paying attention.

Richard never made it through high school. He ended up in a lot of trouble in his life, and to me, that was a failure of the educational system and nothing else. There was nothing wrong with Richard's behavior. I could see the same potential dilemma with Tibet. Being able to learn at his own pace is important for keeping him interested and not having that powerful, positive mental energy turn against himself or against society. As a student I spent a lot of time waiting for those few precious moments when the learning environment met my ability to learn, and although it did turn out that those few moments were enough to keep me from shutting off to learning, they didn't have to be so few and far between. The first poem I ever really liked was one by Richard Brautigan which goes, in its entirety, "My elementary school teacher should have ridden with Jesse James for all the time she stole from me." I guess Richard and Tibet and I aren't alone in this.

Tibet and I met once a week for an hour and a half. He does a lot of work on his own, in between, as well. After a while, we moved from a teacher-student relationship to a mentor-apprentice one, in which he works for me on some of my contracts. He's gotten to see how I actually work on real-world problems. He gets to see not only how things are done, but why. I think this is very important. There were very few computer courses when I went to school, but the few that I took were mostly about how academics would solve problems, which is not how things are done in the world of commerce. When I went out into the world I ended up spending two or three years fighting the real world until I realized that the real world wasn't wrong; I'd been taught wrong. Particularly in a field like computers, where three years constitutes a generation, it's ideal to have a teacher who is also a practitioner of the trade so that what is being taught is the current state of the art.

Of course, one reason working with Tibet is so rewarding is that he's an amazing kid. I've done some mentoring of hard-luck cases, kids who really didn't get the kind of fathering that they needed, and I've been able to help them, which is rewarding too. But what a treat to be able to work with someone who's smart and happy and loves the work! It was so much fun for me to be with a kid who feels about learning the way I do. In some ways it almost feels like cheating to get all the credit I've gotten for giving him this real-world teaching, when in fact it has become more of a partnership and friendship that he and I developed.

There are lots of side benefits for Tibet in this real-world experience, too. We went together to a computer show this year where I was selling one of my products. I taught a class at the show and had Tibet help me teach it. I had him go around the class and show the grown-up programmers how to do a concept that he and I had invented together. At the end he said to me, "It didn't concern them that I was 16. All they saw was that I am a programmer and I can do this." It was powerful for him to watch how people interacted with him so respectfully.

Another thing I've passed on to Tibet is how I've managed to weave my way through the labyrinth of possible dead ends in my field. I love what I do now, but there are a lot of programming jobs that I wouldn't do. I've been able to show Tibet how and why I've made the choices I've made. I've occasionally given him some of the work that I hate to do so that he can see the drudgery too, and we've talked about the fact that that drudgery is some people's whole job, which is hard for him to imagine. Now if he decides to be a programmer in his adult life, he not only knows how to program but also what aspects of it he likes and doesn't, and how to make the part he likes into a living. He knows what to say yes to and what to say no to.

I've taught groups in several different contexts, but I find the one-on-one relationship particularly satisfying because your minds get a chance to interact directly. When you teach a whole class, you kind of throw ideas out and watch as some people get it and some don't. Working directly with Tibet, I can *feel* him get it. It's a very powerful experience.

All in all, working with Tibet has helped me see how much I've learned about my craft over the years and given me a chance to pass on my legacy to the next generation. It's created camaraderie where there was only solitude. And it's given me a chance to right some of the wrongs done to me and my generation by an educational system that couldn't meet the needs of the kinds of minds that it should be most excited to nourish.

Joining an Artist in Her Studio

From Colette Yon of New York:

I met Sarah Mantell's family just before I began homeschooling with my daughter. Sarah's mother Amy was very helpful in getting us started, and now that we're in our second year, I've become quite friendly with the family. I've always enjoyed Sarah's company, so a few months ago I asked her if she would like to come and work in my studio with me and my daughter Natalie.

I work primarily in oils and watercolors, and I have my studio on the third floor of my house. I knew Sarah was very interested in the kind of work I do, so inviting her to join me seemed like a natural thing to do. Her parents never said anything to me like, "It would be nice if you would work with Sarah," but I knew that she had done a lot of artwork on her own already – when she read, she made sculptures of the book characters, for example. I knew she had this interest and ability. Even though it was to be an informal setting, I wasn't sure how she would respond to my invitation; you never know if such a prospect will seem too daunting. But it turned out that she was really looking forward to coming to the studio.

We try to meet at least once a week. Sarah brings some ideas she's interested in, and we talk about how to make them happen. Or sometimes I have ideas of things we can do. One time I was talking to Sarah about how I was disappointed in myself because I hadn't been doing much work outside. For three years, I'd had a nice French easel that you can take with you everywhere, and I'd never used it. So we decided to go outside and work together. We dressed up and took turns posing and then sketching each other. It was really fun; sometimes you need someone else to give you the incentive to do something that you've been meaning to do. In fact, that's what has been especially enjoyable about having Sarah come to the studio: I'll say to myself, "What have I not done for myself lately that I might like to do and that Sarah might find interesting?"

When Sarah arrived at my studio the first time, I took the time to show her where everything was and to let her know that she was welcome to use the materials. She also had her own materials with her. Now, sometimes she comes in and gets right to work on her own project, so we're working side by side, and as we work we talk about music and books and movies and other things that are not related to what we are doing. It's nice simply to be able to have companionship when you're working. I've tried to arrange a similar set-up with adults but what so often happens is that a competitive element emerges. I find that when working with someone of a different age, this is less likely to happen.

I remember that when we first arranged for Sarah to work with me, her mother wanted to make sure that I really wanted to do this and that I would have enough time for my own work. But it's easy to have enough time for my own work when Sarah, Natalie, and I are mostly just working comfortably together. Sarah's not a student to me; she's a friend. If I perceived her as a student, I probably would feel under a greater obligation to teach her specific things; I might indeed feel that having her there took time away from my work. Instead, even when Sarah is asking me questions as I'm working, I find it interesting rather than distracting. Often when she arrives, I'll set her up with whatever she needs and then continue to do my own thing, and after a while she'll come over to watch me paint. She was very interested in how I catch light – how I see it and how I manage to paint it. So she asked me several questions about it, and it was actually quite pleasant for me to step back and think about how I do what I do. I appreciate the opportunity particularly because I haven't found a group of people in this area with whom I can get together and talk about my work.

I'm sure that being able to observe the process of my work and ask me questions about it is valuable for Sarah too, because so often, people show you their finished products but you don't get to see the process. Sarah has seen me stretch the canvas, prime the canvas; she's seen all the work that goes into painting. And sometimes she will look at something I've done and say, "That's great, I love it," but I'll tell her that I'm not satisfied with it, that I don't think it really works. She asks why, and as I explain it to her she learns something about how I think about my work and what I'm trying for. What's fun about this for me is that adults aren't always as honest; they're more guarded. Sarah has never been rude, but she's honest – she'll express her own opinion about what works or doesn't work, and I enjoy that kind of conversation.

I try to help Sarah look at her own work constructively, because sometimes she'll get frustrated and think that nothing's right, nothing's the way she wants it. I encourage her not to be so hard on herself, to learn to play with it rather than worrying about having the line be just this way. It helps her to see that no matter what age you are, things don't always work, and you need to learn to work with mistakes. Some of my best work has come out of making a mistake and then fixing it.

If Sarah has questions about how to work on something, I'll show her a technique, but I don't say, "This is how you have to do it." In drawing people, for example, she has a very individual way of working, and I don't want to ruin that. And Sarah knows that when she asks me a question, I'll answer it through telling her how I deal with that same problem in my own work. She was fascinated by how I paint water. That's something that's very hard to do; I've struggled with it and am not always successful. I told her that there are times when it just clicks and times when it doesn't, and I think it was helpful for her to hear that, just as it's helpful for me to reflect on my work as I try to explain it to her.

I taught art years ago, and I really enjoyed the children's ideas and enthusiasm. I had a lot of flexibility in how I taught. One of the things I've noticed is that somebody whose background is in art education won't teach the same way as somebody who is an artist. People trained in art education have the view that you have to have a product at the end of every experience, yet they don't always give the students enough time. In this area, the schools give 35 minutes for art class, and the student has to have a product at the end of each class. I know from my own experience that, so often, that doesn't work. So many kids will tell me that they hate art, which is so sad to me. Practicing artists know that it often makes no sense to say, "There will definitely be a finished product at the end of these 35 minutes." And often, the higher the child's standards are, the more frustrated they feel at having to work under these conditions. In one art class, the children were shown a picture of the Sistine Chapel, told briefly about Michelangelo and how he had to paint the chapel lying on his back, and then were given the assignment of lying down under the table and painting that way. You can see how this might strike a teacher as an innovative idea, but most of the kids weren't at all happy with their product, which doesn't surprise me.

So these are some of the limitations I see in how art is often presented to children. I feel fortunate that I can share my love of art with Sarah and Natalie in an environment where there are no philosophical or time constraints. Having 15-year-old Sarah join me and my daughter in my studio has been a fun and enjoyable experience for all of us. ◆

Watching Children Learn

Homeschoolers' Orchestra

Jennifer Biggs Walton of California writes:

When I first began homeschooling my kids four years ago, the only experience I thought they would miss out on was being in a musical ensemble class. After searching the Internet and asking practically everyone I ran into for ways to provide this experience, the leads were few and far between. Some groups held auditions to get in. Other ensembles had age or skill requirements. Then there were those groups rehearsing on Saturday mornings, which I really didn't want to accept.

My background in music began at age 3 when I started violin lessons. When I was 5, my parents added piano lessons. My father is John Biggs, a composer, and my mother, Salli Terri, was a well-known singer and arranger. When I was a kid, I toured the world playing music professionally with my family's ensemble called the John Biggs Consort. We played Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Modern music. I was, and continue to be, totally immersed in music. Now I am fortunate to be called to play on motion picture soundtracks such as *Mulan, Dr. Dolittle, Small Soldiers, As Good as it Gets, Deep Impact, Armageddon,* and many others. This work is part time and our homeschooling works with my schedule.

It was becoming obvious that my best choice was to create an orchestra just as I wanted it to be. I decided to found the Rainbow Kids Homeschool Orchestra, a subgroup of our support group, which is called the Rainbow Kids. This group is a collaborative effort of many people who have all levels of musical abilities. Everyone helps out where they can in the way they can. We meet once a month for two hours. We divide into sectionals of similar instruments and work on the tunes for the day, and then we get into group formation and all play the selections at the same time. Following this comes an open-forum time where anyone can play whatever he or she likes, one at a time. Their pieces don't have to be polished, although some are truly amazing. I didn't realize how successful and enjoyable this would be. Some kids, teens, or adults decide to play just the first few measures of whatever they are working on with their private teachers, and others play their old favorites.

The result is very encouraging and educational at the same time. We use the *Essential Elements for Strings* series, which uses harmony on all the orchestral selections within the series. Even if there are only a few people on a part, they can play top or bottom lines and hear an immediate musical result. They make musical pals as well!

In addition to all this, we hope to offer a couple of concerts per year for family and friends.

Volunteering in Youth Orchestra Office

Hannah Addario-Berry (BC) writes:

One of my main passions in life is music. I have played the cello since I was 8 and I am now studying it very seriously. I have played in the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra for two years now and it has been a wonderful experience. After my first year there, I went to the manager and proposed to do some kind of volunteer or paid part-time work at the orchestra office. She talked it over with the board, and since then I have been working four hours per week, half volunteer, half paid. My duties are extremely varied (each week I usually learn one or more new things about how the orchestra is run), from poster distribution to computer database updates to filing to writing press releases to answering telephones. Once I designed and produced a publicity survey, which was distributed at the concert, and then I tabulated the results.

From the work at the orchestra office, I have acquired a very good reference for future jobs, and I have also been offered the position of orchestra librarian for the coming year.

Families Enjoy Writing Round-Robin Stories

Todd Taska (VT) writes:

Last year, my family and I took part in round-robin story writing organized by homeschooling mother Nancy Deaver. We had a lot of fun with it and would like to organize another one to take place in late winter / spring of 1999. Here's how it works:

Each person is part of a group of four writers. Everyone begins by writing the first page of a story, then sends it on to the next person in the group. Next, everyone writes the second page of the story started by the previous person. This process continues until each writer finishes a story. At the end, each story contains a page (at least) written by each group member. The person finishing each story mails it back to the one who started it, and that person sends a copy of the completed story to each person in the group. You have two weeks to complete each writing installment.

Many surprising things can happen to a story written in this manner. It is entertaining, and it is empowering to realize that not only professional writers can do this sort of thing. I majored in engineering in college and had never written any fiction until I got involved with these round-robin stories, and I found that I had a lot of fun with it. My wife's group was a group of women from around the country, and in their writing they incorporated personal material from their lives and from their parts of the country, so it ended up being a great way to get to know each other. The flavor of each person's writing was different and it was always a surprise to get the next installment in the mail. It loosened up everyone's writing. The added bonus was the way they all got to know each other – some even ended up phoning each other just to talk.

Our 11-year-old daughter Hannah's group – kids ranging from 10-12 – was probably the most successful group in terms of the writing they produced. They got really into it and included drawings to go with the story. Hannah too loved the surprise element, the way there were always remarkable twists in the story when the next writer jumped in. Hannah happened to like writing already, so for her the fun of the round-robin stories was connecting with other kids who also like to write. We live way out in the country and she doesn't know many other kids who like to write. But I think the round-robins could be great for someone who doesn't already like writing, too. It's a great way to become interested in writing.

About 84 people participated in the round-robins last year, from all around the country. We're looking forward to doing it again. Before you rush to sign up, though, a word of warning: please try to assess whether you really have the time and determination to commit yourself to this. I experienced great disappointment when I did my part last spring but only received one completed story. Do not sign up if you are feeling totally overwhelmed by other demands on your time and energy.

This is open to kids and adults and we will try to match you with three others in your age range. If you want to take part, please send a SASE by January 25,1999 to Todd Taska, 1926 Valley Rd, Lowell VT 05847. Please include your names and ages.

History and Science Groups

Cindy Thoman-Terlazzo of Maryland writes:

Our family has found what we feel are some pretty interesting and fun ways to study world history and environmental science this year. For history, we've joined with two other families – kids' ages ranging from 11-15 – to meet once a week and watch two segments from a video series on world history. The series is titled "World History: The Fertile Crescent to the American Revolution." This is a high school-level class presented by Lin Thompson, a high school history teacher from Bellflower High School in Los Angeles. The series consists of 30 half-hour lessons. We watch one, then have a discussion, have a break, and then watch the second. The Teaching Co. (the company that offers these videos) provides a workbook and answer booklet which you can use to record the highlights from each section (but you don't have to use it).

We are pleased with the tapes. I think they provide a good overview, a place to jump off from. We plan to complete the series by Christmas and then supplement their material with books, especially lots of historical fiction, and visits to various museums.

We are also highlighting Ancient Greece with another group of seven families (kids' ages ranging from 7-17). We're meeting once or twice a week in a four-week intensive, studying various topics through another video series titled "Greek Fire" (available through the library system). We follow the videos with discussions and other activities including Living History presentations, in which the kids impersonate and tell the story of a particular character from Greek history. We've lined up a day of museum visiting with tours in Philadelphia, we've watched a film adaptation of *The Odyssey*, had our own mock Olympics and Greek gods charades, created our own stories and pictures of a Greek god, built our versions of Greek buildings with foam board, and are doing a paper on a particular aspect of Greek life. All of this is also supplemented by various books and magazine articles.

As I re-read this, I recognize that it sounds ambitious. It is. Two mothers organized the schedule and the activities with the input of their kids and then they offered the idea to other families and invited them to

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participate. The sessions have been going really well with the full participation of the kids and other parents offering nice tidbits along the way.

For science, we again have been meeting in a group (the same one that is involved in the Greek studies). In August and September we met five times, approximately four hours each day, with a friend who is a biologist. Tom (the biologist) led the group, having the kids do various water testings in a variety of settings (farm pond, swamp, small stream, larger stream) as well as observing the waters for physical parameters and biological life. The group also visited a sewage treatment plant. This group ended with an afternoon of presentations – the kids speaking on various topics ranging from the water cycle and pollution to the variety of plant and animal life found in local waters.

We also took a field trip into the Baltimore Harbor with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. It was an excellent program. We again tested the health of the water, observed the life in the waters, collected samples from the river with a net, checked out a newly re-seeded oyster bed, crabbed, and noticed how industry affects (for good or ill) the relationships between people and the life in the bay.

We've also done some independent readings and are planning to participate in various volunteer projects sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. We're also interested in an overnight study program with the CBF or with the Marine Science Consortium on Wallops Island, VA – a research center which offers a variety of educational programming using the marine environment as a living classroom.

Some of these ideas involve some money; others involve time and organization. My kids have really enjoyed the energy created in the group of families and have found the explorations of these topics lots of fun. I feel fortunate to be connected with a number of families and to be able to come together for such shared explorations. Next year we're talking about a group study of chemistry, sparked by one parent's conversation with a high school chemistry and physics teacher. This teacher is quite intrigued by homeschooling and offered his services to us.

My children are 11 and nearly 15. As I mentioned, the kids in the group ranged from 7 to 17. Since many of these kids are of high school age, the emphasis of the activities has been geared toward a high school level. We are finding that the younger kids work quite well in this group, each coming in at their own self-determined levels.

Here are addresses of the companies and organizations I mentioned: The Teaching Co., 7405 Alban Station Ct, Suite A-107, Springfield VA 22150-2318, phone 800-TEACH12. The Marine Science Consortium, Box 16 Enterprise St, Wallops Island VA 23337, phone 804-824-5636. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 162 Prince George St, Annapolis MD 21401, phone 800-445-5572.

Grown Homeschooler Says: "I Didn't Miss Out"

Jamie Smith Hopkins wrote in issue #81 of the Maryland Home Education Association newsletter:

A decade ago, when homeschooling was still considered avant-garde by the general public, I was often asked if I missed being at school. "No," I would answer, simply. "You can't miss something you've never had."

Such a literal answer from a 10-year-old always got a laugh. But now, at 21, a few weeks away from a college degree and several months into a marriage, I can look at that old question from a larger perspective – and I know I didn't miss out on anything by learning at home. Instead, I gained so much more.

Sure, I didn't go to the prom, but judging from my friends' experiences, that's no loss. And while I didn't get to play for a school athletic team, I swam for a community league and figure skated competitively in rinks up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

And, more importantly, I cannot remember a time when I hated to learn. Learning was usually fun and always interesting. I liked to read, I liked to write, I liked doing math – all right, occasionally I was frustrated, but I also like a challenge – and even science, my least favorite subject, was never a chore. Homeschooling allowed me, with help from my parents, to design a curriculum that held my interest.

In "elementary school" – for lack of a better phrase – learning was relatively formal. Math was courtesy of Miquon, language arts came from a textbook, and history and science were a job for Mom, who read books to me as we sat under cozy blankets on the couch in our Columbia, Maryland home.

By middle school, I was more independent. Dad and I decided on good biographies and overviews for history and science, and I read them on my own. I worked on Saxon math, again alone – usually hunched on the floor in my bedroom, even though I had a perfectly good table and chair. For English, I picked out classics like *Jane Eyre* and *The Great Gatsby*.

High school was the same, only more so, and a year before I "graduated," I took the sound advice of homeschool veterans and enrolled in several courses at the local community college to find out what the next educational step was going to be like.

The big questions the public and new homeschoolers alike seem to have now revolve around college – specifically, will a homeschool graduate be accepted into one? And if so, will he or she succeed academically? And even if that happens, won't the homeschooler be out of his or her social league?

I'm no educational expert, but I do have a little experience in this area, and none of the homeschoolers I knew had any problem. In fact, they all did extremely well. One of my friends is going into her senior year of college with a 4.0 grade-point average in the academically challenging field of biology. Another graduated with distinction in both her two majors. And these former homeschoolers have social lives, too.

But the college atmosphere is a change from the homeschool one, at least in some ways. Grades, for instance. When I started at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) in 1995, I had a case of the nerves – mostly because I was afraid the classes were too hard and I'd lose my full-tuition scholarship. Getting a

B- minus on my first paper didn't help. But grades haven't turned out to be a problem, and by the end of that first semester, I felt much more comfortable. (I later found out that almost every student, homeschooled or not, feels at least a little nervous at the beginning of his or her college career).

One thing that helped me out is that, academically, college is very similar to homeschooling – in both arenas, students do a great deal of independent study. In that way, and because I wasn't tired of learning, as some of my schooled friends were, being a homeschooler gave me an edge. I was used to a high level of student-teacher interaction from the homeschooling experience, so in college, I wasn't afraid to ask questions and I made a point to get to know my professors. College students who file in and out of class as if they're still in high school are often the ones who see their grades slip.

And what about socialization? In the medium-sized research university I attend, I probably would have felt pretty lonely if I just came to class and went home. As it happened, I didn't – I've spent most of my college time in the cramped offices of the school newspaper instead. I joined to get experience, but it was also a great way to get to know others, and a good education in working with people of completely different temperaments. (Additionally, the newspaper was where I met my husband, but that's another story.) Involving yourself in a campus club or organization is one of the best ways to have a social life in college: it makes big universities seem small and turns the foreign into the familiar.

So homeschoolers can master college. But what about the work force? Again, I think those who learn at home in their formative years are ahead of the game – or at least have a great opportunity to get there.

It's often hard to figure out exactly what your career goals are, and the average person waits until college to decide, which can be a waste of time and money. You see, what you major in generally depends on what you want to do, and if you're not sure what you want to do, you may change majors several times, keeping you in college longer.

A little career dabbling before college is a means of avoiding all that. And homeschoolers, with their flexible schedules, are in the best position to do it. Visiting Dad or Mom's workplace, shadowing an older friend on the job, and internships (paid or unpaid) are just a few ways to find out which careers are interesting, and which ones to cross of the list.

It worked pretty well for me. In the early years of high school, I was certain I'd be in the art field – either as a graphic artist or an animator – and I spent hours drawing and designing. But after talking to an aunt who's a graphic artist, reading up on the career possibilities, and visiting art schools, I began to think it wasn't for me. And once I spent some time as a staff writer for my community college's student newspaper, I switched gears. Reporting seemed like the thing to do. The summer before I started studying English and journalism at UMBC, I interned at a local weekly to test my theory out, and decided I liked this career choice.

If I had been really on the ball, I could have been interning throughout my high school years, as some of my homeschool friends did. It's a great time to intern, because you don't need to wait until summer or winter vacations, as I feel pressured to do as a time-poor college student.

If all goes well, I'll graduate in December – which means by January, I'll be flung out into the work force. It's a pretty scary thought, but I feel prepared by the foundations homeschooling gave me. Ultimately, that's how I know I didn't miss out by learning in a two-story house instead of a 30-seat classroom.

Taking Community College Classes as a Teenager

Kathy Horsky wrote in the November/December 1998 issue of Hearth Notes, *the newsletter of the Connecticut Home Education Association:*

When Tess started her first class at Middlesex Community Technical College (MXCTC), she was somewhat apprehensive. Although she had done

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well on the English placement exam required for entrance into some classes, she was a month and a half away from turning 14 and was fearful that it would be very obvious to some people that she did not belong. Actually, Tess looked older than her age and with high school juniors and seniors now able to take community college classes, she blended in easily. She did tell me that she felt some embarrassment at times when someone would discover her age and exclaim, "Wow! You're only 14?!"

The administrative process was not difficult. We tried to sneak through a general registration day but got stopped at the first station when Tess wrote down "homeschooled" for the high school space. Several administrators were sent to speak to us and we were told that Tess would need to have an interview with the Dean of Admissions. Since it was very close to the first day of classes, I told them that I didn't think that an interview was necessary and that I believed that placement tests were given to predict a student's ability to succeed. Someone quickly pulled her file and although her scores placed her into a credit-bearing English course (she began with a Literature class), the small but oh-so-serious group of administrators concluded that the interview was still something she needed to do. A couple of days later, we drove to MXCTC for Tess's interview which we laughed about later. One of the questions we remember was, "What would you do if someone asked you out on a date?" However, after I questioned the effectiveness of a short interview, the Admissions Director explained to me that what the college is concerned about is the maturity level of younger students. He told me about a 13-year-old homeschooled student who apparently wanted to draw attention to herself. Her teacher had gone back to the Admissions Office and complained, "Why did you let this student into my class?" Please, parents, realize your child's limitations and don't put him into an environment for which he's not yet ready. No counselor can judge this better than you can and several poorly behaved kids could cause an adverse reaction toward homeschool kids in community colleges.

Tess continued to take one class a semester for three years. She started out in her strongest discipline, English Literature and English Composition, and progressed to what were (for her) more difficult subjects, including Algebra II and Biology with a lab component. We looked for classes she would be likely to succeed in to start with and then looked to diversify her education with courses such as Communications, Philosophy, and Sociology. For the last two semesters, Tess was also on the Student Senate. This year, in what would be her senior year of high school, she is taking German I at Southern Connecticut State University. She was ready for a change, and when it comes time to fill out college applications for more selective colleges, I think it will look like she's interested in tackling a more challenging environment.

Overall, our experience with MXCTC has been very positive. Tess was easily accepted as a peer by the other students; her grades indicate that her professors also felt she belonged in their classes. Mira, her younger sister, took Design I last year (at the age of 14) and found another high-school-aged homeschooler in class with her!

Tutorials with College Students

From Julia Bergson-Shilcock (PA):

My friend Cailin and I have found that arranging tutorials with college students is a great way to learn things that we want to learn with some guidance and help. As I was getting older, I kind of wanted to pull away from my parents a bit more and to do something that would be a little bit different. I decided that working with a tutor would be fun, and I thought I would try psychology. My older sister Emily was taking a psychology class during her first year at college, and the books she was reading always looked interesting. My friend Cailin had been working with tutors for a while already – she would hang up a sign on bulletin boards at local colleges, and she got good results. So when we wanted a psychology tutor, we found a senior at Haverford College who was interested in helping us.

Initially he thought that he would have to make up tests for us and do a lot of extra work outside of our weekly meetings, but we told him that we just wanted to get an overview of basic psychology. We wanted to have reading assignments in between sessions, but, we weren't ready for papers and midterms. We were only 14 then, and we just wanted to get our foot in the door and begin exploring this. We knew it would be hard for us, because we were going to be using his college psychology textbook. But he did a good job of picking out specific parts that he thought we could understand.

We met once a week for two hours and discussed our assigned reading. It was very informal, and we all felt comfortable voicing our opinions. It wasn't like with some teachers where you're afraid to ask because you feel you should already know the answer.

Each week our tutor would check with us to make sure that we were happy with how the class was going. He wanted to be sure we were getting what we wanted, that we were learning enough but he wasn't going too fast or it wasn't too boring.

Cailin and I always did our homework on the phone together. We would take turns reading the assignment aloud and trying to understand it. There were so many confusing parts, and often one of us would understand it more quickly than the other, so we helped each other.

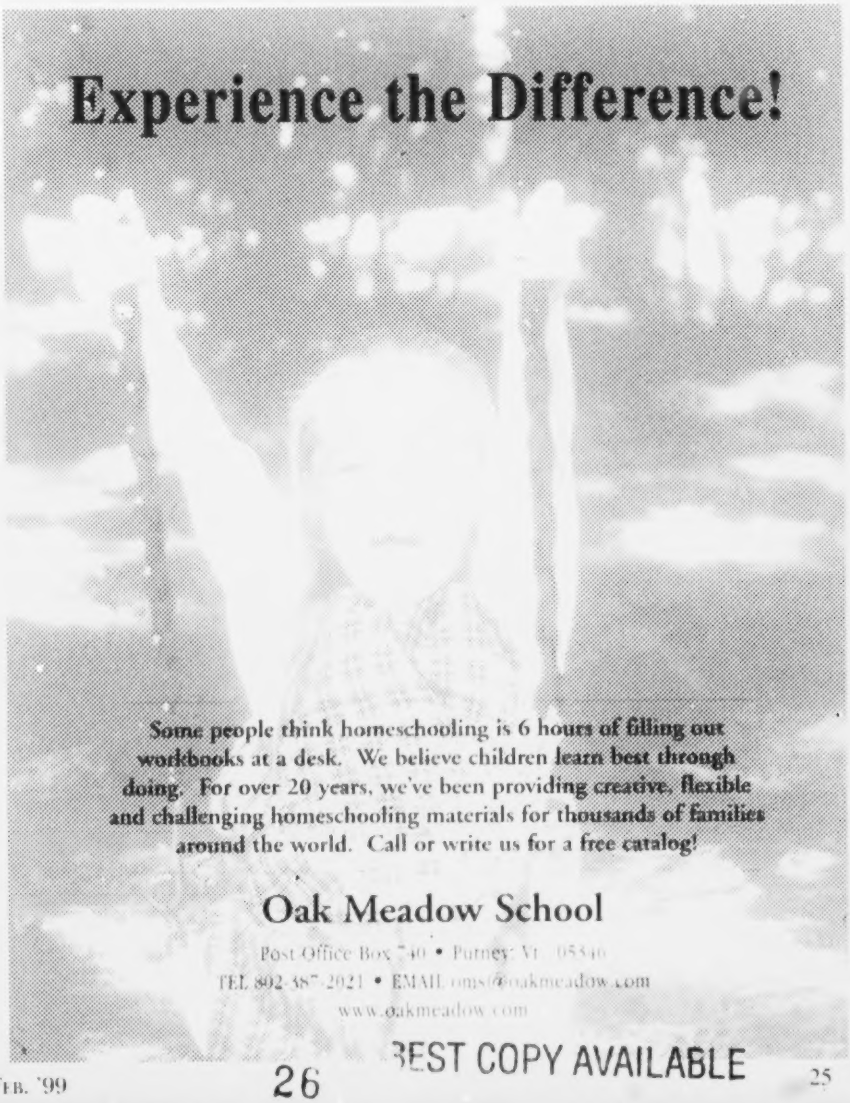
After this experience worked out so well, I started taking Latin with a good friend of our family's, David, whom we'd known for years. He was a homeschooler and is now a junior at Villanova University.

I decided on Latin because one of the requirements to get a diploma from our local high school is to have a foreign language. Homeschoolers can get a diploma – my two older sisters have done that – and I knew I wanted one also, but I wasn't sure what language to take. For me, with something like a language, if I don't really want to learn it, I'm just not going to put in the time you need. But Latin interested me because so many of our English words are derived from it; it seemed like it was language and history pulled into one.

Again, Cailin was also interested, and David's younger sister Christine, who is my friend too, asked if it would be OK if she joined us. So the three of us meet with David twice a week. We work out of a textbook, and as in the psychology class, we feel comfortable asking questions. It's not hard for me to take instruction from David even though I've known him since we were young, because it's clear to me that he has so much knowledge in this area. In fact, one of the things I like about working with someone just a few years older is that they often remember what it's like to be our age.

The other class Cailin and I are taking now is a literature class with a junior at Temple University. We told Lucy that we wanted to get a taste of a lot of different things. We've read some poetry, some short stories, some one-act plays. Lucy comes up with the recommendations, but what's nice is that she's flexible about it. We want to dip into different things, but if we come to something we really like, then we can spend more time on it.

I think working with college students is a great idea for homeschoolers. For me, the small group works well, but it could also work to have a few more in the group. One of the draws for college students is that they're always looking for extra cash. But from our perspective, a college student tutor charges a lot less than an adult professional who is trying to earn a living from tutoring. So it works well financially (but I think you could also work out a bartering arrangement), and it works well in all the other ways I've described, too. ◆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A Conversation with **Madeleine L'Engle**

photo by Nancy Crampton

In a letter that Madeleine L'Engle sends to the hundreds of young readers who write to her each month, she says, "I wrote my first story when I was five years old. It was about a 'little grul' because that was how I spelled 'girl' when I was five, but at least it was a story, and I've been writing stories ever since." Indeed she has, and her books – *A Wrinkle in Time, A Wind in the Door,* and many others – are well known and well loved by many GWS readers. Her characters, who often don't fit into the conventional school world, are deep-thinking, interesting young people, and L'Engle is clearly a writer who takes children seriously. To explore some of these connections between her work and ours, we interviewed Madeleine L'Engle at her office at the library of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Susannah Sheffer: I want to tell you that this interview will be read by both young people and adults, and that reminds me of the answer you once gave in another interview to the question of why you write for children. You said, "Because I can't tell the difference between literature for children and literature for adults." So that usual distinction isn't a meaningful one to you?

Madeleine L'Engle: No, because people underestimate children's capacity to understand big concepts. Mostly children can understand a lot of things their parents can't. The only difference in a children's book is the age of your protagonist. Why should you write less well for kids than you do for grown-ups? Whether it's going to be a child's book or an adult's book doesn't enter into my mind when I'm writing; I just try to write the best I can.

SS: A lot of the young people I know who love your work love precisely those big concepts. I think it's hard sometimes to be a young person who is wondering about big questions, and maybe you reach these readers simply by knowing that they *are* wondering such things.

ML'E: Yes, I get letters all the time from all over the country saying that people aren't interested in the big questions, only in little things.

SS: You've said elsewhere that there used to be so many rules about what you could and couldn't say in a book meant for children.

ML'E: My book *Meet the Austins* was criticized because it opened with a death. There was the thought that children couldn't understand anything big or difficult, and that life had to be prettied up for them. But children already know that life is not all pretty, so that idea didn't make sense. One of the problems with *A Wrinkle in Time* was that it deals with evil. Children weren't supposed to know that there was evil. Well, if you walk down the street in any village, you see evil.

SS: Were you in a position of having to respond to that charge?

ML'E: No, I just wrote what I needed to write!

SS: And now it seems to me some people make the opposite criticism; they say that children are exposed to too much.

ML'E: They do make that criticism. Sometimes now they say that we write about nothing but the ugly things. The real point is that life is a combination of both.

SS: Was that business about *A Wrinkle in Time* dealing with evil one of the reasons it had such a hard time finding a publisher? Was it that issue in particular?

ML'E: It took me two and a half years to find a publisher for that book. It was that issue and every other issue: "Tesseract" isn't on a limited vocabulary list; the children in the book were interested in things that children aren't even supposed to know about; the character Meg got into danger. And I used a female protagonist! They said I wasn't supposed to use a female protagonist either.

SS: How did you keep the faith in that book, when everybody was doubting it?

ML'E: I'm stubborn! And I knew it was a good book. I mean, you do have that sense, that this is a good book, and you just hang on to that.

SS: In this issue of GWS we have mentors talking about their work with young people, and they make the point that young people seldom have a chance to see work in progress, and to see the struggles that people go through. It's great for our readers to hear that you had such a hard time getting that book published, when we now know how successful it turned out to be.

ML'E: When it comes to writing, I think that very young people, say third or fourth grade, aren't up to work in progress yet. Let them write what they want to write. Then as you learn to write, you begin to learn to revise. You don't start revising with your first story.

SS: Picking up on that point about "tesseract" not being on limited vocabulary lists, in another feature in this issue of GWS, a homeschooling parent writes about noticing that children's literature was becoming more and more didactic, that it seemed to need to have explicit educational value. What do you think about that distinction between educational material and just plain children's books?

ML'E: If I want to give a lesson, I'll preach a sermon. When I write a story, I write a story. It's like wearing a dress and having the slip hang! A story is supposed to be a story; you don't want the message to show, you want it to be implicit. And you don't have to worry about limited vocabulary – kids know all the words, or if there's a scientific word like "tesseract" that is unfamiliar but is necessary, they'll learn it through reading. That's how I learned my vocabulary.

SS: Another reason I think many of our young readers are drawn to your books is that so many of your characters have a strong sense of their work and interests. They're serious in a way that adults often don't expect young people to be. I'm thinking of a 13-year-old who wrote to us saying that in school, you say, "When I grow up, I want to be an artist," but now, out of school, she finds that she can say, "I'm an artist now, and I think I'll still be one when I grow up." I don't think this is arrogant or even necessarily means that she has an exceptional talent; it just means that she doesn't see youth only as a time of waiting or of preparation. And then I think of your character Katherine in *A Small Rain*, who was serious about the piano. So many of the other people at her boarding school didn't understand that seriousness.

ML'E: Katherine was a genius at the piano. She'd come from an adult world, in which she'd spent most of her childhood, and had been shoved out of that into a kids' world of boarding school. She had come from a world in which it was logical for her to be preparing to be a serious pianist.

SS: Were the teachers at the boarding school right to tell her to lessen her commitment to her work?

ML'E: Well, that's what my teachers told me. But it felt awful. I hated it.

SS: In one way or another many of your characters don't fit into the school scene. Why does that come up so often for your characters, that there's some chafing or some dissonance between them and the world of school?

ML'E: Because I write about what I know. That was totally my experience. I was put down, and my stories were put down, by the teachers. They thought I was stupid. I think they didn't respect that sort of work, or didn't think it was what a child was supposed to be interested in. You were supposed to be interested in basketball, or running relay races. I had a bad knee and was no good at sports. I was not helpful to teams, so I was put down there, and I guess the teachers decided that a general put down was called for.

SS: With your characters, when there's a struggle between their own lives and the school life, are you primarily on their side?

ML'E: Of course.

SS: Is it OK if a child like Charles Wallace in *A Wrinkle in Time* and *A Wind in the Door* never fits in? In *A Wind in the Door*, that's the main problem in the beginning, that he doesn't fit in at school.

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ML'E: Some of the great geniuses have never fit in.

SS: There's also a sense in your books that school is not the whole world, that if you don't make it in school that doesn't mean you're in complete exile – there are other worlds in which to grow up.

ML'E: Yes, and that's especially true for any child who has a vocation. Of course, sometimes there is a struggle to find out where you fit, but I think the struggle is not bad.

SS: The example of Polly in *An Acceptable Time* is special to our readers in a particular way, because that's a character who actually doesn't go to school for several months. You have her spend time with her grandparents, learning from them, rather than attending school. How did you think of that?

ML'E: Well, her grandparents knew things she needed to know that were not being taught in school, and she was the oldest and a lot of extra stuff was being dumped on her at home, and she needed some time away. It seemed like a reasonable choice. Of course, she was living way out in the country where there weren't many people close by to ask her questions about being out of school.

SS: That makes me think of the related issue of solitude. You often have characters who crave solitude, sometimes more than is thought appropriate. So many kids' lives are so scheduled nowadays that it seems important to confirm that there's nothing wrong with unscheduled time alone.

ML'E: I think we always need solitude. But we're taught not to, we're taught to be sociable, to fit in the group.

SS: Taught by whom?

ML'E: By the teachers, the organizations, by "them." I myself crave time alone, so I always assumed my kids would crave it too. It just seems like an ordinary thing.

SS: Earlier I mentioned our feature on mentoring. Are there young people with whom you have any kind of mentoring relationship nowadays?

ML'E: All my young people have now grown up. I used to have that, people asking for my help with stories they were writing, or saying, "Let me read you this paper I'm working on." I always felt that if they asked for that kind of help, they should get it.

SS: Did you have that sort of help when you were younger?

ML'E: Nope. That's why, when I was asked for it, I gave it! ◆

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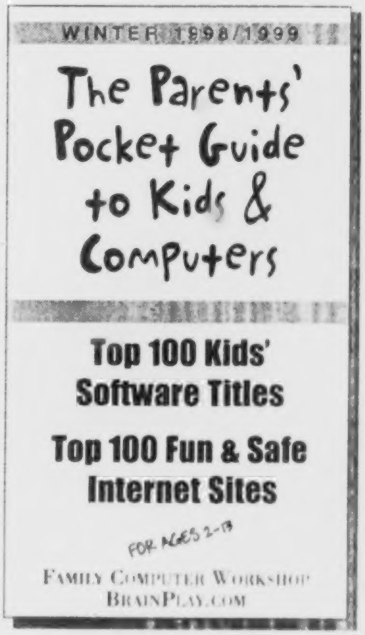
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Resources & Recommendations

The Horn Book Magazine

Phoebe Wells (MA) writes:

I began reading parenting publications 15 years ago when I became a stepmom so I could quickly get up to speed in all sorts of vital skills, like packing lunchboxes and making Halloween costumes. The things I read were pretty low-key, practical, and generally confidence-building. About eight years ago, though, I began to notice a change in the articles I was reading. The rainy day suggestions had fewer arts and crafts ideas and more suggestions of "edutainment" to buy. The new message seemed to be getting stronger: in order to be worthwhile, child's play must be full of lessons in disguise.

Still trusting these information sources (and my stepdaughter's teachers), I would go to the library armed with their booklists and bring home fiction books that got a lukewarm response and nonfiction books that were endured at best. I too read these recommended books, both because I've always been interested in children's literature and because I felt I had to be prepared for those "teachable moments" which were then coming into vogue. I was struck by how these books seemed almost entirely geared for kids to use when writing school reports. They had limited vocabulary, the text was little more than a string of facts, and the illustrations were disconnected from the text.

Fortunately, I was rescued by two things: *Growing Without Schooling* magazine and a librarian who asked me why I checked out so many mediocre books each week. Didn't I know such-and-such authors? the librarian asked, mentioning names that were unfamiliar to me. Finally I was saved from medicinally educational reading by strong literature that respects children and inspires their curiosity.

It was several more years before I discovered how my librarian knew about all these great books she was now recommending to me. The library's main source of children's book recommendations was the *Horn Book* magazine. Another librarian lent me a copy, and I'm so glad she did. The *Horn Book* is a goldmine of well-written critical reviews of only the best in new kids' books of all types for all ages. Judging from the books they choose, the editors obviously have a deep respect for children's intelligence and abilities. You will never find them recommending books intended to "get" kids to learn something. Instead they eagerly share books which are truly a pleasure to read and are authentic, stimulating, and meaningful. But I don't mean to imply that all their suggestions are heavy; in fact, many are good honest fun.

Apparently this vision began with Bertha Mahony Miller, a Boston bookseller who founded the *Horn Book* in 1924. Subsequent editors have remained faithful to her original enthusiasm and high standards. Our family has enjoyed scores of their recommendations. Most of my son Eoin's history favorites were discovered in the *Horn Book's* pages. My younger son Daire and I especially like to take an issue, clean the library shelves of books reviewed for his age, and then spend several hours wrapped up in good stories and beautiful illustrations. I remarked to my librarian when I returned my first issue of the magazine that I felt my values and world views so much more supported by the *Horn Book* than by many designated family-friendly magazines. She replied that many parents have told her that while other parenting magazines have sold out to mainstream consumerism, the *Horn Book* has continued to offer depth and meaning.

An added bonus for confirmed bibliophiles like myself are the articles, which are like icing on the cake. I find children's literature a wonderful way of looking at issues and trends facing children today, so I was delighted to find such thoughtful and well-informed articles. For example, one issue has articles examining the accuracy of popular historical fiction and the authenticity of multicultural literature written by people outside the cultures. The same issue prints the acceptance speeches from the 1997 winners of the *Boston Globe-Horn Book* awards. One by Kazumi Yumoto, who won for the book *The Friends*, echoed what I've read in GWS about school refusers in Japan. In another, Walter Wick, author of the winning (and well-loved in our house) *A Drop of Water*, recounted his days as a poor student and described the school visits he now makes to talk about his photographs. He says, "After slide presentations, which involve a lot of audience participation, teachers often comment to me that the most active participant – the hero of the assembly – is a kid who does not otherwise perform well. My comment to the teacher is always the same: 'I was that kid.'" You can see why I find so much confirmation of my own beliefs in these articles.

The Horn Book also publishes a second goldmine, *The Horn Book Guide*. Issued twice a year, each Guide briefly rates and reviews every new hardcover kid's book published in the U.S. in the past six months – that's about 2000 books per Guide! The Guide is so clearly organized that anybody can do a complete search on virtually any topic and find good recommendations in seconds. We use the Guide frequently. We quickly amass a stack of books on whatever the current obsession is in our house: trains, honeybees, math, biographies of children's book authors, or non-scary, non-school-based, novels for young kids.

The only downside of this great resource for me is that I can't afford my own subscriptions ($40 for the magazine and $45 for the Guide). Fortunately, my librarians realize the value of both publications and have gotten second copies which circulate. If you and/or your librarians would like a sample copy or a list of their *Boston Globe-Horn Book* award winners, contact them at The Horn Book, Inc., 11 Beacon St, Boston MA 02108; 800-325-1170; email info@ hbook.com; website: www.hbook.com. ◆

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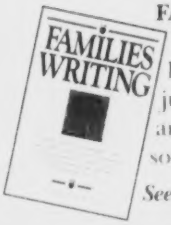

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See p. 6 of this issue for writing by Peter Stillman

LEARNING ALL THE TIME, John Holt. **BACK IN PRINT!** John Holt was working on this book before his death and it was completed using his articles in GWS and other previously uncollected writing. It demonstrates that children, without being coerced or manipulated, can and do pick up "the basics" from the world around them. John suggests simple ways anyone can give children the slight assistance they may need to learn reading, writing, math, science, and music. Paperback. #1492 $12.00

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1999 Directory of Families

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Here is our complete 1999 Directory. Entries that arrived after our deadline (late October) will be published in GWS #127.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particuliar area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those who ask to be listed, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

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01760-5840 **(H)** ••• Judith & Peter WEILER (Gabrielle/82) 66 Taylor Rd, Stow 01775 ••• Beth & Sadler LOVE (Kelly/83, Katelyn/84) 10 Martin Ln, Stowe 01775 ••• Patty & Mark MILIOTIS (Geordie/82, Arianna & Alexandra/85) 14 Thresher Rd, Andover 01810 **(H)** ••• Bruce & Heidi BACON (Anabel/91) Phillips Academy, Andover 01810 ••• Christine VOSS (Jason/86, Alexander/88) 16 Bartlett Dr, Georgetown 01833-1501 ••• Mary Ellen MOORE & Josef KISH (Peter/88, Jenna/91) 56 Baremeadow St, Methuen 01844 ••• Bill & Shirley TOOMEY (Ned/91) Deerfield Farm, 73 Cross St, Methuen 01844 ••• John & Mary WALLACE (Tony/78, Monica/84) 54 Lacy St, N Andover 01845 ••• Claudette & Jonathan BEIT AHARON (Nathan/83, Noah/87, Miriam/91) 705 Westford St, Lowell 01851 ••• Manoj PADKI & Manisha KHER (Gautam/94) 142 Princeton Blvd, Lowell 01851 **(H)** ••• Fayth & Peter SPINNEY (Abram/91, Quentin/92) 73 Burnside St, Lowell 01851 ••• Lisa GWIAZDA & Matthew DONAHUE (Matthew/89, Gregory/90) 11 Eastview St, Lowell 01852 **(H)** ••• Martin MILLER (Martin/92) 119 Wentworth Av, Lowell 01852 ••• Al & Gert LECH (Melissa/82, Amanda/85) 5 Red Oak Acres, Merrimac 01860 ••• Alysa & Gary DUDLEY (Rachel/86, Jennifer/90, Heather/92) 13 Ashdale Rd, N Billerica 01862 ••• Judy & Richard HALEY (Kevin/89, Cara/91) 29 Fiske St, Tewksbury 01876 ••• Tom & Mary MAHER (Scott/70, Mandy/75) 30 Park St, Wakefield 01880 ••• Lucia & Thomas JENKINS (Taylor/80, Kyle/82, Alexis/84, Zachary/88, Cameron/91) 16 Hawthorne St, Wakefield 01880 ••• Vicky & Scott DORAN (Katelyn/86, Andrew/89) 14 Atwood St, Wakefield 01880 ••• Earl & Phyllis SPIVACK (Rebecca/92) 16 Emerson St, Wakefield 01880 ••• Pete & Wendy DITMARS (Hillary/90, Matthew/92, Christopher/96) 6 Joyce Cir, Westford 01886 ••• Ro KILLORY ANDERSEN & Larry ANDERSEN (Trevor/83, Sinead/88, Tristan/90) 32 Fletcher st, Winchester 01890 ••• Keith & Christine St GEORGE (Kallie/92, Ashley/93, Nicole/95) PO Box 937, Lynn 01903 ••• Chris & Caroline CLAUSEN (Neil/90) 23 Phillips Rd, Nahant 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BC — Rachel ROSS-HERBISON & David HERBISON (Brynne/89, Vida/92, Maryn/96) #1 Licha Ln, Argenta V0G 1B0 **(H)** ••• Stephanie JUDY & David

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McGuffey Academy, 2213 Spur Trail, Grapevine TX 76051; 817-481-7008
The Moore Foundation, Box 1, Camas WA 98607; 360-835-2736
National Book Co, 333 SW Park Ave, Portland OR 97205-3784; 503-228-6345
Oak Meadow School, PO Box 740, Putney VT 05346; 802-387-2021
Our Lady of Victory Schl, 4436 E Alpine Dr, Post Falls ID 83854; 208-773-7265
Phoenix Special Programs, 3132 W Clarendon, Phoenix AZ 85017 (high school)
Rod & Staff Publishers, Crockett KY 41413; 606-522-4348
School for Young Performers, 2472 Broadway Suite 312, New York NY 10025; 1-800-390-5899 (K-12; students can enroll for one course or the full program)
Seton School Home Study, One Kidd Ln, Front Royal VA 22630-3332; 540-636-9990
SMM Educational Services, Box 1079, Sunland CA 91040 818-352-2310
U of Nebraska Independent Study High School, Continuing Ed Ctr Rm 269, Lincoln NE 68583
Weaver Curriculum, 2752 Scarborough, Riverside CA 92503 (Pre K-6th, 7-12th supplements)

Helpful Private Schools

Private schools enrolling or helping homeschoolers in various ways (curricula, legal help, support).

Abbott Loop Christian Ctr, 2626 Abbott Rd, Anchorage AK 99507
Abbington Academy, Box 3303, Gibbs Av, Wareham MA 02571; 508-291-1229 (Cape Cod only)
Arivaca Community School, PO Box 24, Arivaca AZ 85601
Branford-Grove School, PO Box 341172, Arleta CA 91334; 818-890-0350
Bay Shore School, PO Box 13038, Long Beach CA 90803; 310-434-3940
Cascade Canyon School, 459-3464 (San Anselmo, CA)
Clonlara Home Based Education Program, 1289 Jewett St, Ann Arbor MI 48104; 313-769-4515
Cooperative Learning Ctr, 451 Papaya St, Vista CA 92083; 619-726-3020
Dayspring Christian Academy, PO Box 60956, Palo Alto CA 94306
G.A.T.E. School, 1725 N Date #43, Mesa AZ 85201; 969-4821
Grassroots Free School, 2458 Grassroots Way, Tallahassee FL 32301; 904-656-3629
HCL Boston School, PO Box 2920, Big Bear City CA 92314; 909-585-7188
Horizon Academy, 21102 Pleasant Park Rd, Conifer CO 80433; 303-697-8158
Independence Private School, c/o Principal, M. Black, 45 Albert St North, Orilla, ONT L3V 5K3, Canada
The Learning Community, 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia MD 21045; 410-730-0073
The Learning Community, Inc, PO Box 5177, Herndon VA 22070
Little Piney School, Rt 1 Box 20, Newburg MO 65550
Little Red Home School, 9669 E 123rd, Hastings MN 55033; 437-3049
Magic Meadow School, PO Box 29, N San Juan CA 95960
Meter Schools, PO Box 427, Rosharon TX 77583
Mount Vernon Academy, 184 Vine St, Murray UT 84107
Mt Carmel Academy, RD 1 Box 1737, Waterville VT 05492
Newbridge School, 3131 Olympic Blvd, Santa Monica CA 90404; 310-315-3056
Pilgrim Christian School, 3759 E 57th St, Maywood CA 90270; 213-585-3167
Pinewood School, 112 Road D, Pine CO 80470; 303-670-8180
Puget Sound Community School, 1715 112 Av NE, Bellevue WA 98004; 206-455-7617
Rocky Mountain High Academy, PO Box 418, Flora Vista NM 87415
Santa Fe Community School, PO Box 2241, Santa Fe NM 87501; 505-471-6928
Seedling, c/o Joy Reiter, 69 Sanderson Crescent, Richmond Hill Ontario L4C 5L5, Canada
Sidney Ledson School, 33 Overland Dr, Don Mills, Ont, Canada M3C 2C3; 416-447-5355
TEACH, 4350 Lakeland Ave, N Robbinsdale MN 55422
Thalassa!, 5917 Oak Av, Suite 176, Temple City CA 91780-2404; 818-287-8595
Upattinas School, 429 Greenridge Rd, Glenmoore PA 19343; 610-458-5138
The Venice Community School, 31191 Road 180, Visalia 93292; 209-592-4999
Virtual High and WonderTree Education Society, PO Box 380, Vancouver BC V5Z 4L9, Canada 604-739-5941

Homeschooling Organizations

Some of these groups are statewide (look for the state name in the group's title as an indication) and are likely to have information about state laws or regulations, and may have conferences and packets of information for new homeschoolers. Other groups are local support groups that are likely to have meetings and activities. Both state and local groups may have newsletters. Try getting in touch with a state group even if it's far away from where you live; many state groups can refer you to families, or smaller support groups, in your immediate area.

State or Local Groups: (alphabetically by state):

AL: **Alabama Home Educators**, PO Box 16091, Mobile 36116
East Lake UMC Academy, 6206 Whippoorwill Dr, Pinson 35126; 205-680-35126 (acts as cover school)
Valleydale Home School Academy, 2408 Valleydale Rd, Birmingham 35244; 800-987-6277 or 205-987-7132
AK: **Alaska HomeSpun Educators**, PO Box 798, Girdwood 99587; email 102155.700@compuserve.com
Homeschoolers Unlimited, 392D Kenai Av, Ft Richardson 99505-1227; 907-428-1022; gsanty@galenaalaska.org
Sitka Home Educators, PO Box 1191, Sitka 99835
AZ: **Arizona Families for Home Education**, PO Box 4661, Scottsdale 85261-4661; 800-929-3927
Bethany Home Educators, 2720 S Flint Cir, Mesa 85202
East Valley Educators (Phoenix/Metro area), Sue 602-983-5660 or Sylvia 602-987-1404
Home School Supplies 1125 E Quick Draw Pl, Tucson 85749
Phoenix Learning Alternatives Network, 8835 N 47th Pl, Phoenix 85028; 602-483-3381 – check again
SPICE, 10414 W Mulberry Dr, Avondale 85323; SusanT@AZTEC.asu.edu
Telao Home Educators 520-749-4757 (Tucson)
AR: **Arkansas Christian Home Education Assoc**, PO Box 501, Little Rock 72203
Coalition of AR Parents, PO Box 192455, Little Rock 72219; 501-888-1942
CA: **California Homeschool Network**, PO Box 55485, Hayward 94545-0485; 1-800-327-5339; email CHNMAIL@aol.com
Esparto Homeschoolers, PO Box 305, Esparto 95627; 530-787-3613
Home School Assoc of CA (formerly Northern CA Homeschool Assoc), PO Box 2442, Atascadero 93423-2442; 888-HSC-4440; web page www.hsc.org (newsletter, legal news, local support)
Homeschooling Coop of Sacramento, 15 Moses Ct, Sacramento 95823-6368
Humboldt Homeschoolers, PO Box 2125, Trinidad 95570; 707-677-3290
Los Angeles Homeschoolers, PO Box 1166, Malibu 90265; 310-456-3845
Mtn View Park Homeschoolers, 6603 Mammoth Av, Van Nuys 91405-4813
North Santa Clara Valley Homeschoolers, 795 Sheraton Dr, Sunnyvale 94087
Peninsula Homeschoolers, 4795 Lage Dr, San Jose 95130; 408-379-6835
Riverside Area Home Learners, 731 Mt Whitney Cir, Corona 91719; 909-279-4026
San Diego Home Educators, 619-281-6581
San Francisco Homeschoolers, c/o Anne Donjacour, 41 Eastwood Dr, San Francisco 94112-1225
School of Home Learning Support Group, 1904 Flora Vista St, Needles 92363; 619-326-2107
Sonoma County Homeschoolers Assoc, 5584 Carriage Ln, Santa Rosa 95403; 707-765-2181; artcraftr@aol.com

South St Centre, Box 261, Boulder Creek 95006 (resource ctr for families)

South Valley Homeschoolers Assn, Box 961, San Martin 95046

SPICE, c/o PO Box 282, Wilton 95693

Tri-City Homeschoolers, 39195 Levi St, Newark 94560

Wildflower Homeschoolers, 1557 Vancouver Way, Livermore 94550; 925-455-0465

Yosemite Area Homeschoolers, PO Box 74, Midpines 95345

CO: **Boulder County Home Educators**, c/o Berg, 1495 Riverside, Boulder 80304; 303-449-5916

Colorado Home Educators' Assoc, 3043 S Laredo Cir, Aurora 80013; 303-441-9938; email chea@tms-co.com

CO Home Schooling Network, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia 80135; 303-688-4136

Fall River Homeschool, PO Box 3322, Idaho Springs 80452

Home Educators for Excellence of Durango, c/o Gring, 315 Timberline Dr, Durango 81301

Home Educators Like Me, 1015M S Taft Hill Rd #100, Ft Collins 80521; 970-206-9569

Rocky Mtn Education Connection, 20774 E Buchanan Dr, Aurora 80011

West River Unschoolers, 2420 N 1 St, Grand Junction 81501; 970-241-4137

CT: **Connecticut Home Educators Assoc**, PO Box 250, Cobalt 06414; 203-781-8569

Unschoolers' Support, 22 Wildrose Av, Guilford 06437; 203-458-7402

DE: **Tri State Homeschoolers Assoc**, PO Box 7193, Newark 19714-7193

FL: **Florida Parent-Educators Association**, PO Box 1193, Venice 34284-1193; 877-275-3732

Homeschool Network, 548 N Lake Pleasant Rd, Apopka 32712-3904; 407-889-4632

Tallahassee Homeschool Grp, 5227 Wild Olive Way, Tallahassee 32310; 850-575-7091

GA: **Atlanta Alternative Education Network**, c/o Sheffield, 1672 Cody Cir, Tucker 30084; 404-636-6348

Cobb County Homeschoolers, 813 Wyntuck Dr, Kennesaw 30144

Free to Learn at Home, 4439 Lake Forest Dr, Oakwood 30566; 770-536-8077 (teen group)

Harvest Home Educators, PO Box 1756, Buford 30518; 770-455-0449

North Side Atlanta Homeschoolers, c/o Jane Kelly, 4141 Wieuca, Atlanta 30342

HI: **Christian Homeschoolers of Hawaii**, 91-824 Oama St, Ewa Beach 96706; 689-6398.

Hawaii Homeschool Assoc, PO Box 3476, Mililani 96789

Hawaii Island Home Educators, 968-8076 or 965-9002

The Tropical Homeschooler (newsletter), c/o Pinsky, 220 Waipalani Rd, Haiku, Maui 96708; 808-572-9289

IA: **IA Families for Christian Educ**, RR 3 Box 143, Missouri Valley 51555

Iowa Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 213, Des Moines 50301

ID: **Family Unschooling Network**, 1809 N 7 St, Boise 83702; 208-345-2703

Home Educators of ID, 3618 Pine Hill Dr, Coeur d'Alene 83814; 208-667-2778

IL: **Evanston Home Educators**, Maureen O'Grady, 847-676-2440

HOUSE, 9508 Springfield Av Evanston 60203; 847-675-3632 (statewide)

Spectrum Homeschoolers, c/o Karolyn Kuehner, 10859 S Longwood Dr, Chicago 60643-3312; 773-779-7608

IN: **Families Learning Together**, c/o Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51 St, Indianapolis 46205; 317-255-9298

IN Assoc of Home Educ's, 850 N Madison Av, Greenwood 46142; 317-859-1202

Wabash Valley Homeschool Assoc, c/o Palmer, 2515 E Quinn Av, Terre Haute 47805; 812-466-9467

KS: **Central Kansas Homeschoolers**, c/o Susan Peach, Rt 1 Box 28A, Rush Center 67575

Christian Home Educators Confederation of Kansas, PO Box 3564, Shawnee Mission 66203; 316-945-0810

Lawrence Area Unaffiliated Grp of Homeschoolers, c/o Michener, RR 1 Box 496, Perry 66073

Teaching Parents Assoc, PO Box 3968, Wichita 67201; 316-945-0810

KY: **KY Home Education Assoc**, PO Box 81, Winchester 40392-0081

Madison County Homeschool Assoc, 239 Reeves Rd, Richmond 40475

LA: **Southwest Acadiana Homeschoolers**, 507 S. Arenas, Rayne 70578; 318-334-2812

Wild Azalea Unschoolers, 6055 General Meyer Av, New Orleans 70131 504-392-5647

ME: **Maine Homeschool Association**, PO Box 421, Topsham 04086; 1-800-520-0577

Peninsula Area Homeschooling Assoc, PO Box 235, Deer Isle 04627

Sebago Lake Homeschoolers Support Grp, RR 2 Box 54, Sebago Lake 04075; 207-642-4368

Southern Maine Home Education Support Network, 76 Beech Ridge Rd, Scarborough 04074; 207-883-9621

Western Washington Cty Homeschoolers, RFD 1 Box 93, Harrington 04643

MD: **Educating Our Own**, 686 Geneva Dr, Westminster 21157; 410-857-0168

Family Unschoolers Network News, 1688 Belhaven Woods Ct, Pasadena 21122-3727

Glen Burnie Home School Support Grp, c/o Whetzel, 6514 Dolphin Ct, Glen Burnie 21061

Home & Unschoolers Group (HUG), RR 1 Box 925E (Biscay & Pinkham Rds) Damariscotta 04543; 207-563-2383

Maryland Home Education Assoc, 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia 21045; 410-730-0073

Maryland-Pennsylvania Home Educators, see under Pennsylvania

North County Home Educators and **Family Unschoolers Network**, 1688 Belhaven Woods Ct, Pasadena 21122-3727

Prince George's Home Learning Network, 3730 Marlborough Way, College Park 20740; Jacqui Walpole 301-935-5456; Sydney Jacobs 301-431-1838

MA: **ALOHA** (A Loosely Organized Homeschool Assoc), c/o Hazelton, 24A Calamint Rd N, Princeton 01541; 978-464-7794

Alternative Ways of Learning (unschooling grp), PO Box 1274, Charlton City 01508; 508-248-7182

Apple Country Homeschooling Assoc, PO Box 246, Harvard 01451; 978-456-8515

Berkshire Homeschoolers Grp, 217 Old State Rd, Berkshire 01224; 413-443-1770

Cape Ann Homeschoolers, 108R Main St, Rockport 01966; 978-546-7125

Franklin County Homelearning Families, Jean Johnson, 72 Prospect St, Greenfield 01301; 413-773-9280

Groton-Dunstable Home Educators, c/o Leslie McLeod-Warrick, 663 Townsend Rd, Groton 01450; 978-448-0929

Homeschoolers of Mass. Education Club (Boston area), contact Phoebe Wells, 617-876-7273

Homeschooling Together (Arlington/Belmont area), Sophia Sayigh 781-641-0566

Lowell area Group, Debbie Finch, 978-458-3896

Mass. Home Educators, 22 Garland St, Lynn 01902; 781-599-6267

Mass. Home Learning Assoc, PO Box 1558 Marstons Mills 02648; W. Mass contact Loretta Heuer 508-429-1436; E. Mass. contact Kathy Smith 978-249-9056

Medway/Mills Support Group, 508-359-5910

Nashoba Valley Unschoolers, c/o Andy Migner, 118 Cobleigh Rd, Boxboro 01719; 978-635-9847

Newburyport Area Homeschool Network, 32 Columbus Av, Newburyport 01950; 978-462-5680

North Shore Support Grp, 978-468-4663 or 978-658-8970

Pathfinder Learning Center, PO Box 804, Amherst 01002; 413-253-9412

Plymouth PALS, Eileen Fortunato 508-747-0297

SE Mass. Homeschool Assoc, PO Box 4336, Fall River 02723-0403; 508-672-0248

Wakefield area Group, Lucia Jenkins 781-246-2059

MI: **Benzie Home Educators**, PO Box 208, Benzonia 49616

Families Learning and Schooling at Home (FLASH), 21671 B Drive N, Marshall 45068; 616-781-1069

Heritage Home Educators, 2122 Houser Rd, Holly 48442

Home Educators' Circle, 1280 S John Hix, Westland 48186; 313-326-5406

Info Network for Christian Homes, 4150 Ambrose NE, Grand Rapids 49505

Older Homeschoolers Group, c/o Linn Family, 9120 Dwight Dr, Detroit 48214; 313-331-8406

OWL (Oakland, Washtenaw, Livingston) Homeschool Support Group, c/o Debra Cohn, 6036 Seven Mile, S Lyon 48178; 810-437-8931

Sunnyridge Alternative Learning Ctr, HCO 1 Box 134, Pelkie 49958

MN: **Fargo-Moorehead Homeschool Assoc**, 1909 8th St S, Moorehead 56560

Minnesota Homeschoolers Alliance, PO Box 23072, Richfield 55423; 612-288-9662

MS: **Home Educators of Central Mississippi**, 4083 Robin Dr, Jackson 39206; 601-366-9218

Oxford Homeschool Network, 21 CR 3024, Oxford 38655

MO: **Ozark Lore Society**, c/o Eisenmann, HC 73 Box 160, Drury 65638; 417-679-3391 (Ozark area grp)

SHELL (Springfield Home Education: Learning for a Lifetime), c/o Leah Rosenthal, 810 S Kickapoo Av, Springfield 65804; 417-866-4017

St. Louis Homeschool Network, Karen Karabell, 4147 W Pine, St. Louis 63108; 314-534-1171

MT: Bozeman Homeschool Network, c/o Lora Dalton, 201 S 6 Av Apt A, Bozeman 59715; 406-586-3499; Dalton@vesi.net

Montana Coalition of Home Educators, PO Box 43, Gallatin Gateway 59730; 406-587-6163

NE: **LEARN**, 7741 E Avon Ln, Lincoln 68505; 402-488-7741

NV: **Home Schools United/Vegas Valley**, PO Box 93564, Las Vegas 89193-3564; 702-870-9566

NH: **New Hampshire Home School Coalition**, PO Box 2224, Concord 03302; 603-539-7233

NJ: Educational Excellence-School at Home, PO Box 771, Summit 07901; KindPals@aol.com

No. Jersey Home Schoolers Assoc, 44 Oak St, Hillsdale 07642; 201-666-6025

The Tutor, 1239 Whitaker Av, Millville 08332; 609-327-1224

Unschoolers Network, 2 Smith St, Farmingdale 07727; 908-938-2473 (statewide)

Unschooling Fams. Support Grp of Central NJ, RD 1 Box 713, Jobston 08041; 609-723-1524

NM: **Glorieta Family Educators**, Star Rt 1 Box 404, Glorieta 87535

Home Educators of Santa Fe, 21 Frasco Rd, Santa Fe 87505; 505-466-4462

Homeschooling PACT, c/o Senn, Box 961, Portales 88130; 505-359-1618

Unschoolers of Albuquerque, 2905 Tahiti CT NE, Albuquerque 87112; 505-299-2476

NY: **APPLE** (Attachment & Positive Parenting & Lovingly Educating) **Family and Homeschool Group**, PO Box 2036, N Babylon 11703; 516-243-1944; email lilights@aol.com

Families for Home Educ, 3219 Coulter Rd, Cazenovia 13035; 315-655-2574

Fingerlakes Unschoolers Network, 201 Elm St, Ithaca 14850; 607-273-6257

Homeschoolers Network of the Mid-Hudson Valley, RD 2 Box 211P, Ski Run Rd, Bloomingburg NY 12721; 914-733-1002

Long Island Homeschoolers Assoc, 4 Seville Pl, Massapequa Park 11762; 516-795-5554

New York City Home Educators Alliance. PO Box 1214 Murray Hill Station, NY 10156; 212-505-9884
New York Home Educators' Network. Anne Hodge, 39 North St, Saratoga Spgs 12866; 518-584-9110 (statewide)
OASIS (Oneonta area Sharing in Schooling), PO Box 48, Gilbertsville 13776; 607-783-2271
Rochester Area Homeschoolers Assoc. 275 Yarmouth Rd, Rochester 14610; 716-271-0845
Western NY Homeschoolers. Gloria Zemer, 18 Maple Av, Portville 14770; 716-933-8669
NC: **Families Learning Together**. 1670 NC 33 West, Chocowinity 27817; email cn2464@abaco.coastalnet.com
North Carolinians for Home Education. 419 N Boylan Av, Raleigh 27603-1211; 919-834-NCHE
ND: **ND Home School Assoc**. PO Box 486, Mandan 58554; 701-223-4080
OH: **Christian Parents Assoc**. 310 Bluebonnet Dr, Findlay 45840 (local only)
Families Unschooling in the Neighborhood (FUN). 3636 Paris Blvd, Westerville 43081; 614-794-2171; email Roy@gn.net
Growing Together. c/o Nancy McKibben 1676 Trendril Ct, Columbus 43229
Heights Homeschoolers. 2065 Halsey, S Euclid 44118
HELP Northwest Ohio. 3905 Herr Rd, Sylvania 43560; 419-843-7179
Home Education League of Parents (Central Ohio). PO Box 14296, Columbus 43214; 614-470-2219
Home Education Resource Organization. 170 W Main St St, Norwalk 44857; 419-663-1064
Home School Network of Greater Cincinnati. 2115 Harcourt Dr, Cincinnati 45244; 513-683-1279 or 513-772-9579
LIFE (Learning in Family Environments) Suport Group, PO Box 2512, Columbus 43216; 614-241-6957; email chrisoco@aol.com
Ohio Home Educators Network. PO Box 23054, Chagrin Falls 44023-0054; 330-274-0542
Parents Enriching Alt. Childhood Educ., 9520 Co Rd 10-2, Delta 43515; 337-4810
OK: **Cornerstone** (Tulsa area grp), PO Box 459, Sperry 74073; 918-425-4162
Home Educators Resource Organization. Rt 1 Box 40C,Cleo Springs 73729; 918-396-0108; email mjmiller@pldi.net (statewide grp supporting unschooling)
OR: **Greater Portland Homeschoolers**. PO Box 82415, Portland 97282; 503-241-5350
The Learning Connection. PO Box 1091 #196, Grants Pass 97526; 541-476-5686; janemj.tlc@juno.com
Oregon Home Education Network. 4470 SW Hall Blvd #286, Beaverton 97005; 503-321-5166
Willamette Homeschoolers. 245 W 27th Av, Eugene 97405
PA: **Chester Cty Homeschoolers**. 226 Llandoverry, Exton 19341
Delaware Cty Homeschoolers. 356 S Old Middletown Rd, Media 19068; 610-565-7974
Diversity United in Homeschooling. 233 Bluebell Av, Langhorne 19047; 215-428-3865
Pennsylvania Home Education Network. 285 Allegheny St, Meadville 16335; 412-561-5288
Pennsylvania Homeschoolers. RD 2 Box 117, Kittanning 16201; 412-783-6512
People Always Learning Something (PALS), 105 Marie Dr, Pittsburgh 15237; 412-367-6240
Valley Unschoolers Network (Lehigh Valley area), c/o Kiernan, 4458 Coffeetown Rd, Schnecksville 18078; 610-799-2742
RI: **Parent Educators of RI**. PO Box 782, Glendale 02826
Rhode Island Guild of Home Teachers (Home Spun News), Box 11, Hope RI 02831; 401-821-7700
SC: **Carolina SuperSchoolers**. 777 Hillview St, Spartanburg 29302
Home Organization of Parent Educators. c/o Griesemer, 1697 Dotterer's Run, Charleston 29414; 763-7833
Teacher's Ink (formerly Homeschool Assoc of SC), PO Box 13386, Charleston 29422; 803-795-9982; email pfmsuper@worldnet.att.net
South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools. PO Box 2104, Irmo 29063
South Carolina Homeschool Alliance. 1679 Memorial Park Rd, Suite 179, Lancaster 29720; email ConnectSC@aol.com
SD: **SD Home School Assoc**. PO Box 882, Sioux Falls 57101; 605-335-1125
TN: **Home Education Assoc of TN** (HEAT), 3677 Richbriar Ct, Nashville 37211
Tennessee Homeschooling Families. 1356 Cove Ln, Oliver Springs TN 37840
TX: **Austin Area Homeschoolers**. 510 Park Blvd, Austin 78751
Houston Alternative Education Alliance. 12811 Ivy Forest Dr, Cypress 77429
Houston Unschoolers Group. Holly Furgason, 9625 Exeter Rd, Houston 77093; 713-695-4888; mhfurgason@hotmail.com
North Texas Self-Educators. c/o Jordan, 150 Forest Ln, Double Oak/Lewisville 75067; 817-430-4835
Texas Homeschool Coalition. PO Box 6982, Lubbock 79493; 806-797-4927
UT: **Salt Lake Home Educators**. 6522 Appomattox Way, Taylorville 84123; 801-269-1997
Utah Home Education Association. PO Box 570218, Sigurd 84657-0218; 801-535-1533
VT: **Resource Center for Homeschooling**. c/o Deb Shell, RR 2 Box 289C Polly Hubbard Rd, St Albans 05478; 802-524-9645
Windham County Homeschoolers. RR 2 Box 1332, Putney 05346
VA: **ALOFT** (Alt. Learning Options for Free Thinkers), 2120 Wiggington Rd, Lynchburg 24502
Blue Ridge Area Network for Congenial Homeschooling. c/o Amy Birdwell, 255 Ipswich Pl, Charlottesville 22901
Home Educators Network. 3320 Waverly Dr, Fredericksburg 22401
Home Instruction Support Group. 217 Willow Terr, Sterling 22170
LEARN/No. VA Homeschoolers. c/o Vernon, 1111 Waynewood Blvd, Alexandria 22308
Learning in a Family Environment (LIFE). 40672 Tankerville Rd, Lovettsville 20180; email EBarkan@aol.com
Richmond Educ'l Alternatives for Children at Home (REACH). Box 36174, Richmond 23235-8003; 804-795-7624; carmel@compuserve.com; www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/7440/
VA Home Education Assoc. Rt 1 Box 370, Gordonsville 22942; 540-832-3578; email vhea@virginia.edu
WA: **Clark County Home Educators**. PO Box 5941, Vancouver 98668
Families Learning Together. Box 10 Tiger Star Rt, Colville 99114
Family Academy. 146 SW 153rd #290, Seattle 98166
Family Learning Org. PO Box 7247, Spokane 99207; 509-467-2552
Homeschoolers' Support Assoc. PO Box 413, Maple Valley 98038; 253-891-0384
Palouse Home Learning Alternatives. SE 405 Hill, Pullman 99163
Rainbow Way Playgroup. c/o Bystrom, 8632 Inverness Dr NE, Seattle 98115-3936; 206-522-4313
Seattle Homeschool Grp. 819 NE 84, Seattle 98115; 206-525-8359; email pstielstra@aol.com
Teaching Parents Assoc. PO Box 1934, Woodinville 98072-1934; 425-739-8562
Washington Homeschool Organization. 6632 S 191 Pl Suite E100, Kent 98032-2117; 425-251-0439; email WHOoffice@juno.com
Whatcom Homeschool Assoc. 3851 Britton Rd, Bellingham 98226
WV: **Marion Cty Home Education Org**. RR 6 Box 336, Fairmont 26554
WV Home Educators Assoc. PO Box 3707, Charleston 25337-3707; 1-800-736-9843
WI: **Families in Schools at Home** (FISH), 4639 Conestoga Trail, Cottage Grove 53527
HOME (Madison Chapter), 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison 53705; 608-238-3302
Unschooling Families. 1908 N. Clark St, Appleton 54911; 414-735-9832
Wisconsin Parents Assoc. PO Box 2502, Madison 53701
WY: **Unschoolers of Wyoming**. 429 Hwy 230, #20, Laramie 82070

National or General Homeschool Groups:

American Homeschool Assoc. PO Box 1125, Republic WA 99166-1125; 509-486-2477
Heart of Homeschooling. ed. Shari Henry, PO Box 1055, Madison AL 35758 (newsletter based on ideas of Raymond Moore, Charlotte Mason, and others)
Holt Associates/Growing Without Schooling. 2380 Massachusetts Ave, Suite 104, Cambridge MA 02140; 617-864-3100; fax 617-864-9235
Home Education Magazine/Home Education Press. PO Box 1587, Palmer AK 99645-1587; phone 907-746-1336; fax 907-746-1335
Home School Legal Defense Assoc. PO Box 159, Paeonian Springs VA 22129; 540-338-5600
Home School Researcher. see Nat'l Home Education Research Institute
Homeschool Support Network. PO Box 1056, Gray ME 04039; 207-657-2800
Home Educator's Family Times. PO Box 708, Gray ME 04039; 207-657-2800
Nationall Center for Home Education. PO Box 200, Paeonian Spgs VA 22129; 540-338-7600
National Home Education Research Institute. Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Dr SE, Salem OR 97301-9392; 503-375-7019
National Homeschool Association. PO Box 290, Hartland MI 48353; 513-772-9580
The Teaching Home. PO Box 20219, Portland OR 97220-0219

Special-Interest Homeschooling Groups:

At Our Own Pace. c/o Jean Kulczyk, 102 Willow Dr, Waukegan IL 60087; 847-662-5432 (newsletter for homeschooling families with special needs)
The Drinking Gourd (homeschoolers of color), PO Box 2557, Redmond WA 98073; 206-836-0336 or 1-800-TDG-5487
Home School Assoc for Christian Science Families. 445 Airport Rd, Tioga TX 76271
Homeschoolers for Peace & Justice. PO Box 74, Midpines CA 95345
Homeschoolers Travel Network. NHA 10755 Hibner Rd, Hartland MI 48353
Homeschooling Unitarian Universalists and Humanists. 3135 Lakeland Dr, Nashville TN 37214-3312; 615-889-4938
Islamic Homeschool Assoc of North America. 1312 Plymouth Ct, Raleigh NC 27610
Jewish Home Educator's Network. c/o M. Lowe, 1295 Marshall Dr SE, Salem OR 97302; 503-362-1203; email marilyn.lowe@chemek.com
Nat'l Assoc of Catholic Home Educators. PO Box 420225, San Diego CA 92142
Nat'l Assoc of Mormon Home Educators. 2770 S 1000 West, Perry UT 84302
Nat'l Challenged Homeschoolers Assoc (NATHHAN). 5383 Alpine Rd SE, Olalla WA 98359; 206-857-4257
Nat'l Handicapped Homeschoolers Assoc. 814 Shavertown Rd, Boothwyn PA 19061; 215-459-2035
Simon of Cyrene Assoc (African American Homeschoolers of Christian Faith), PO Box 26357, Rochester NY 14626

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Homeschool Groups Outside of U.S.

Canada:

Alberta Home Educ Assoc, c/o Aine Stastewich, Box 3451, Leduc AB T9E 6M2
Alternative Educ Resource Assoc, 11 Mosely Close, Red Deer, AB T4N 5S8
Calgary Home Eds Encouragement & Resource Society, RR 6, Calgary AB T2M 4L5
Canadian Alliance of Homeschoolers, 272 Hwy #5, RR 1, St George, ON N0E 1N0; 519-448-4001
Canadian Home Educators Assoc of BC, 4684 Darin Ct, Kelowna BC V1W 2B3; 604-764-7462
Community Connections, BJ Smith, 225 37 St NW, Calgary AB T2N 4N6
Cowichan Valley Homelearners Support Grp, RR 7, Duncan BC V9L 4W4
Cowichan Valley Christian Homelearners Support Grp, 1050 Marchmont Rd, Duncan BC V9L 2M7
Educare: Homeschooling News, Box 23021, Woodstock ON N4T 1R9
Education Advisory, 2267 Kings Ave, W Vancouver BC V7V 2C1
Greater Vancouver Home Learners Supp Grp, 604-228-1939; 604-298-6710
Home Education News, Box 39009 Pt Grey RPO, Vancouver BC V6R 4P1
Home Learning Resource Centre, Box 61, Quathiaski BC V0P 1N0
Home School Legal Defense Assoc of Canada, PO Box 42009, Millbourne PO, Edmonton AB T6K 4C4; 403-986-1566
Homebased Learning Society of Alberta, 8754 Connors Rd, Edmonton AB T6C 4B6; 988-4652
Homeschoolers Assoc of N Alberta, 6311 14 Av, Edmonton AB T6L 1Y1
Manitoba Assoc for Schooling at Home, 89 Edkar Cres, Winnipeg MB R2G 3H8
Montreal Homeschoolers' Support Grp, 5241 Jacques Grenier, Montreal PQ H3W 2G8
Montreal Metropolitan Support Group, website http://www.angelfire.com/mn/neverfamily/
New Bruns. Assoc of Christian Homeschoolers, RR 1 Site 11 Box 1, Hillsborough NB E0A 1X0; 506-734-2863
Nova Scotia Home Education Assoc, c/o Marion Homer, RR 1, Rose Bay B0J 2X0; 902-766-4355; marion.l.homer#ns.sympatico.ca
Nova Scotia Support Grp, c/o Laura Uhlman RR 1, Pleasantville NS B0R 1G0
Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, 83 Fife Rd, Guelph ON N1H 6X9; 519-763-1150
Ontario Homeschoolers, Box 19, Gilford, ON L0L 1R0; 705-456-3186
Orilla Homeschoolers' Support Grp, 45 Albert St North, Orilla ON L3V 5K3
Quebec Homeschooling Advisory, CP 1278, 1002 Rosemarie, Val David PQ J0T 2N0
Rideau Valley Home Educators Assoc, c/o Dubuc, 1144 Byron Av, Ottawa ON K2B 6T4; 613-729-0117
Salt Spring Unschoolers Network, 132 Bullock Creek Rd, Salt Spring Island BC V8K 2L3
Saskatchewan Home-Based Educators, 116A Idylwyld Dr. N, suite 13, Saskatoon SK S7L 0Y7
Tri-City Home Learners Network, 604-464-1056 (Port Coquitlan, BC)
Victoria Home Learning Network, 106-290 Regina, Victoria, BC V8Z 6S6
Villa Villekula Homeschool Resource Grp, 1250 Gladstone Av, Windsor ON N8X 3H3; 519-254-3593
Wondertree Educ Society, Box 38083, Vancouver BC V5Z 4L9; 604-739-5943
Yukon Home Educators' Society, Box 4993, Whitehorse YT Y1A 4S2

Australia:

Accelerated Christian Education, PO Box 10, Strathpine, Qld., 07 205 7503
Alternative Education Resource Group, PO Box 71, Chirnside Park VIC 3116
Brisbane Homeschooling Group, Lot 2, Caboolture River Rd, Upper Caboolture 4510
Canberra Home Education Network, 23 Bardolph St, Bonython, ACT 2905, 9
Homeschoolers Australia Pty Ltd, PO Box 420, Kellyville 2153, NSW Australia
NSW Central Coast Homeschool Grp, RMB 6346, MacDonalds Rd, Lisarow NSW 2250, Australia
Sunshine Coast Homeschooling Grp, #40 Browns Rd, Belli Park via Eumundi 4562 Queensland
Yarra Valley Homeschoolers, 9 Salisbury St, Warburton

England:

Education Otherwise, PO Box 7420, London N9 9SG; (tel.) 0891 518303 (has local contacts throughout England and the U.K.)
Home Education Advisory Service, PO Box 98, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 6AN; (tel.) 01707 371854

France:

Homeschooling Bulletin, c/o Sophie Haesen, 7 rue de la Montagne, F-68480 Vieux Ferrette
L'Ecole a la Maison, c/o Nadine Stewart, 6 Grande Rue, F-38660 Le Touvet
Les Enfants D'Abord, c/o Shosha, 4 rue de Lergue, F-34800 Brignac

Ireland:

Sa Bhaile (At Home), Clahane, Ballyard, Tralee, Co. Kerry; 066-26901

Japan:

Otherwise Japan, PO Box Kugayama, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan; email owj@tkb.att.ne.jp

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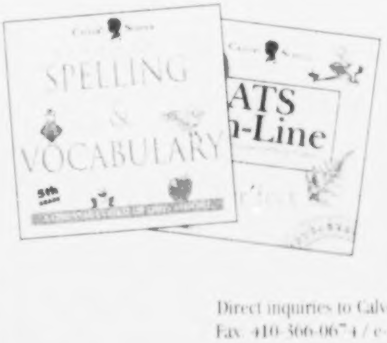

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Netherlands:

Netherlands Homeschoolers, Raadhuislaan 31, 2131 Hoofddorp

New Zealand:

Home Educators Network of Aotearoa, PO Box 11-645, Ellerslie 1131, Auckland
Homeschooling Federation of NZ, PO Box 41-226, St. Lukes, Auckland
The New Zealand Home Schooling Assoc, 5 Thanet Av, Mt Albert, Auckland

South Africa:

National Coalition of Home Schoolers, PO Box 14, Dundee 3000, tel 0341 23712, email durham@iadun-dundee.lia.net

Spain:

Crecer Sin Escuela, c/o Szil Norberg, Apartado 45, Altaz del Pi 03580, Alicante

(for individual family listings in several other countries not listed here, see Directory of Families)

Other Organizations:

These educational, child-raising, or self-reliance organizations are good sources of help and allies. Again, a SASE is appreciated.

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, PO Box 59, E Chatham NY 12060-0059; 518-392-6900 (deals with public, private, and home schools)
Alternative Education Resource Organization, 417 Roslyn Rd, Roslyn Hghts NY 11577; 516-621-2195
EVAN-G, 977 Keeler Ave, Berkeley CA 94708 (against corporal punishment)
La Leche League International, 1400 N Meacham Rd, PO Box 4079, Schaumberg IL 60168-4079; 1-800-LA LECHE
Liedloff Continuum Network, PO Box 1634, Sausalito CA 94966 (people interested in *The Continuum Concept*)
Nat'l Assoc for the Legal Support of Alt. Schools, PO Box 2823, Santa Fe NM 87501; 505-471-6928
National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), 342 Broadway, Cambridge MA 02139; 617-864-4810
Nat'l Coalition Of Alt. Community Schools, PO Box 15036, Santa Fe NM 87506; 505-474-4312

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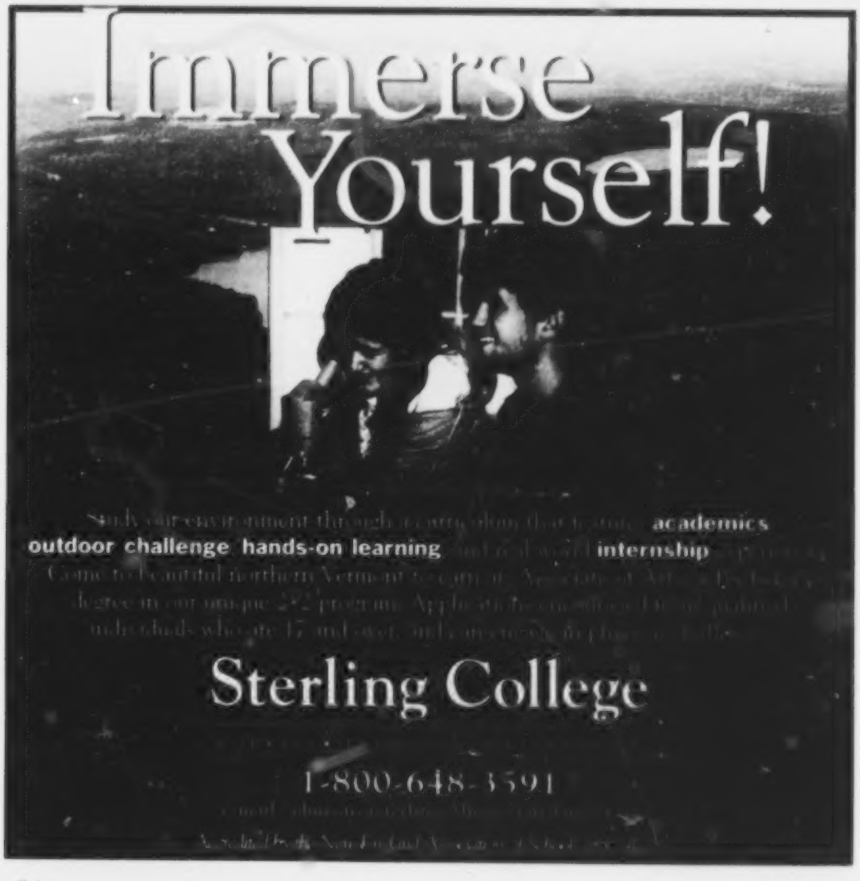

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter. (3) If you're writing to a specific person, write "GWS" or "Holt Associates" on the envelope in addition to the individual's name.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or proscriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

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Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. To be listed, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put

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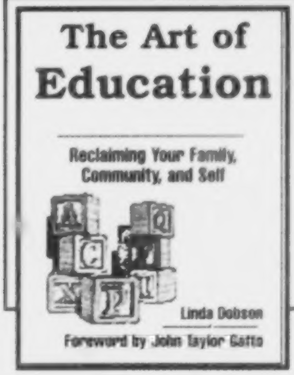
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Linda Dobson
Foreword by John Taylor Gatto

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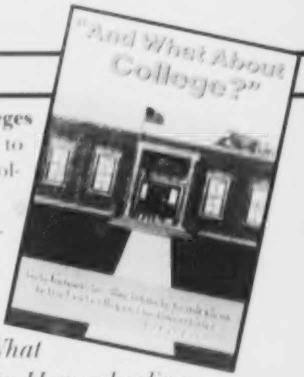

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ISSUE #127
MAR./APR. '99

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BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

John Holt said that when he was writing a book, he often fantasized about its reception after it was published. He imagined people reading the book and talking about it and imagined himself answering questions about it. If he couldn't really imagine this, if something about it seemed fuzzy or off-kilter, then he knew that the book itself was off-track in some way and that he needed to rethink the focus or the approach.

Playful imagining – a playful attitude in general – is so much more central to adult activity than many people realize or openly acknowledge. In this culture, play is what you do after work is done. Or, if you're avoiding what you're really supposed to be doing, play is what you do instead of work. Even people who acknowledge that play is developmentally important to children still tend to view work and play as separate. I don't know which is more distasteful to me: a traditional teacher who gives children a specified hour of play time and then announces it's time to get down to the work of filling out sheets of prefixes and suffixes, or a seemingly innovative teacher who devises a clever game in which, say, children dress up as prefixes and suffixes in order to learn that lesson. A spoon full of sugar may help the medicine go down, but separating things into sugar and medicine still misses the point of how children really see things – and how teenagers and adults are capable of seeing things, too.

We're focusing on learning through play in this issue for several reasons. Here are a few: to show that young children really do know what they need, most of the time. That children learn, through their own self-created play, all kinds of things that they would find more difficult if we extracted them from that free-flowing play and said, "Learn this." That children don't have to stop playing when they become teenagers. And that adults might want to think about how play, experimentation, open-ended exploration, and fantasizing figure in their own lives and work.

In this issue, Peter Bergson describes a corporate executive who used actual hands-on materials to think his way through complicated management problems. A lot of play does involve concrete objects, but a lot of it also involves less visible activities like daydreaming and visualizing. When I'm about to write something – particularly something whose organization seems so complex as to be daunting – I often get into it by thinking of myself as simply messing around: dipping my hands into the finger paint and fooling around to see what designs I get, or mushing the clay this way and that without immediately worrying about the shape of the final bowl. These intangible images of tactile messing around give me the attitude I need. That attitude serves the work; it's part of the work.

I think of Steven Caney's observation (in this issue) that adults often want to see results but don't allow for the process, in themselves or in their children. Let's think of this issue of GWS as a celebration of process – or, better yet, of the idea that process and product are intertwined.

— Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Mass. Court Decision: No Home Visits

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court recently handed down a decision in a case involving a school district's right to conduct home visits with homeschooling families. The case was decided in favor of the homeschoolers, and the wording of the decision is particularly interesting because it emphasizes that homeschooling should not be evaluated in the same way that institutional education is evaluated. We quote from this part of the decision, below.

It's interesting to note that the decision draws heavily on arguments offered by Nicky Hardenbergh, who wrote an amicus brief based on her experiences as a homeschooling mother and certified teacher, and that these arguments are specifically educational, rather than Constitutional. It's also fitting that the decision marks a 20th anniversary of sorts: Justice Greaney, who wrote the decision, was the judge who decided the *Perchemlides v. Frizzle* case in 1978, one of the landmark cases for homeschoolers.

Some brief background: The case, *Michael Brunelle & others vs. Lynn Public Schools*, began in 1995 when two families challenged their local school committee's home visit requirement. (Homeschoolers in Massachusetts are required to have approval of their local school district, but the issue here was whether home visits could be required as a condition of that approval.) The homeschoolers lost at each of the lower courts. In this recent decision, however, the SJC concluded that the district's home visit requirement "is not essential to approval of the plaintiffs' home education plans." After summarizing the facts of the case and noting that, based on existing prior cases, it has indeed been unclear up to now whether home visits could be required, the Justices then summarized other homeschooling laws around the country and noted that only one state requires homeschoolers to submit to home visits by school officials.

Turning then to the specifics of the Lynn district's policy, the decision goes on to say:

> ... The home visit policy was justified by the superintendent of schools in his deposition testimony in the following manner:
>
> "I believe when we adopted the policy I recommended to the School Committee that it was essential that we visit the homes to make sure that the plan is being implemented, that there is an instructional space available, that there are materials present, that there was a schedule that is followed, and my understanding when I recommended it was that we were really concerned about the process and outcomes, not just the outcomes, but the process, too."
>
> These reasons have to be measured against the nature of the home education involved in the plaintiffs' case (namely, parents teaching their children in their own home) which in certain important ways can never be the equivalent of in-school education. For example, at home, there are no other students (except perhaps siblings), no classrooms, and no rigid schedules. Parents who teach at home stand in a very different relationship to their children than do teachers in a class full of other people's children. Teaching methods may be less formalized, but in the home setting may be more effective than those used in the classroom because the teacher-to-student ratio is maximized, a factor permitting close communication and monitoring on an individualized basis. It is obvious from these differences that while the State can insist that the child's education be moved along in a way which can be objectively measured, it cannot apply institutional standards to this non-institutionalized setting. Furthermore, a requirement of home visits may call into play issues of family privacy in seeking to keep the home free of unwarranted intrusion.
>
> We are not persuaded that the reasons given by the superintendent, although articulated by him in good faith, are sufficient to justify home visits as an essential condition to the home education plans in question. While following a schedule may be an important consideration in a public school where preexisting schedules need to be maintained and coordinated, the perception and use of time in a home school are different. The plaintiffs can observe and accommodate variations (from child to child, subject to subject, day to day) in the learning process and teach through a process that paces each student. The results of their teaching programs can be adequately verified through testing without the need to visit the home to see if a formal schedule is being followed. Additionally, the school committee, if desired, can ask the plaintiffs to submit periodic reports on the progress of each child's education in order to indicate what subjects, areas, and materials have been learned and what is planned for the next reporting period.
>
> Similarly, it is not essential to visit the plaintiffs' homes to see if "there are materials present." The plaintiffs can be asked to identify the teaching materials that will be used, and even to show them, if appropriate, to school officials. It should not be overlooked in this regard that some of the most effective curricular materials that the plaintiffs may use may not be tangible. For example, travel, community service, visits to educationally enriching facilities and places, and meeting with various resource people can provide important learning experiences apart from the four corners of a text or workbook.
>
> We also do not consider essential the perceived need to verify that "there is an instructional space available" in the plaintiffs' homes. The

entire home is apparently in each case available to the plaintiffs' children, and whether their educational plans are appropriate should not depend on the size of their kitchen tables or their students' desks. We doubt that parents like the plaintiffs, who are so committed to home education that they are willing to forgo the public schools, and devote substantial time and energy to teaching their children, will let the children's progress suffer for lack of adequate instructional space.

Both the United States Supreme Court and this court have emphasized, in connection with the protected rights of parents to raise their children, that "government may not intrude unnecessarily on familial privacy." Curtis v. School Comm. of Falmouth, supra at 756 & n. 8, and cases cited. This concern (as well as others) dictates, as we said in the Curtis case, that home education proposals can be made subject only to essential and reasonable requirements. The home visits sought to be imposed on the education proposals of the plaintiffs are not essential. We express no opinion on whether home visits can be required (as appears to be the case in New York during any period of probation) if a child is not making satisfactory progress under a home education plan, if a home is used to educate children from other families, or if other circumstances make such a requirement essential, and reasonable standards are formulated to enforce the requirement....

Homeschooling in 1999 – Reasons for Hope

Pat Farenga comments:

This SJC decision spurred me to reconsider some of my more pessimistic observations about the state of education in general and homeschooling in particular. John Gatto has often remarked that homeschooling will continue to grow because too many people are doing it now for it to be contained without a huge uproar; according to John, homeschooling achieved a sort of critical mass by the early 1990s. I think this is true, but I still worry that among the growing numbers of homeschoolers there is a critical mass of opinion that there is one best way to teach all children and that those homeschoolers who choose other paths and schedules for learning should be chastened or stopped. When I read Justice Greaney's decision, I am heartened that we who choose non-curricular methods for allowing our children to learn and grow have some plain-spoken legal support for our decision.

There are other indicators that while most people of the United States and Europe (see my story about my trip to Italy, below) cling to the notion that education is a vital substance that must be distilled to children through certified experts and institutions, the countertrend to this notion is gaining credence. For instance, from the moment I started work at Holt Associates in 1981, I was struck by John Holt's insistence that hyperactivity was not necessarily a problem within a child but could be caused by the teaching methods and learning schedules of schools. I have observed this idea go from radical fringe to one that is now being discussed seriously. A recent cover story of *Time* magazine (11/30/98) about the drug Ritalin begins, "What exactly does a normal child look like? We've long since passed the time when childhood was an ungraded test – take your time, build your forts, play your games, the clock does not start until high school, maybe college. We give homework in first grade now. We're very busy people. And your parents will do anything, just anything, to help you get ahead." The article goes on to talk about how to decide whether a child needs Ritalin, and, at the very least, when you read it you learn that behavioral techniques, changes in diet and environment, and other non-medical interventions, as well as getting two or three medical opinions, are recommended before a family opts for Ritalin. Homeschooling is not an option mentioned in this article (as it is in some books written on the subject), but the point I'm making is that there is an increasing recognition that education involves more than merely passing tests and that children don't react well when they're forced.

Certainly a major goal of all our state and national education reforms is to improve test scores. Our previous Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, Robert Antonucci, announced that teaching to the test is what education is all about, and this attitude is pervasive. However, the legal niche carved out by Justice Greaney and a growing awareness that drugging children may not be the best approach are hopeful signs that the 21st century can accommodate diversity in education and that homeschooling will not be viewed as just another instruction-delivery system to be regulated but as another way to learn and grow.

[SS:] Pat's comments remind me that I've wanted to tell GWS readers about Alfie Kohn's new book *What To Look for in a Classroom? and other essays* (Jossey-Bass, 1998). Don't be put off by the title – this is a wonderful collection that critiques exactly the aspects of schooling that many GWS readers want to challenge. Kohn's work is another example, like the article Pat describes, of an analysis of contemporary education that very much supports homeschooling and its underlying concerns, even though that's not its intent.

In this new book, Kohn critiques the grading system, the ADHD label, school uniforms, simplistic self-esteem programs, television (and not always in the ways you might expect), school choice plans (ditto), and a host of other things. Here's an excerpt from his essay, "Grading: The Issue Is Not How But Why":

> "The trouble is not that we are sorting students badly – a problem that logically should be addressed by trying to do it better. The trouble is that we are sorting them at all. Are we doing so in order to segregate students by ability and teach them separately? The harms of this practice have been well established. ... Are we turning schools into "bargain-basement personnel screening agencies for business?" ... Whatever use we make of sorting, the process itself is very different from – and often incompatible with – the goal of helping students to learn."

Speaking in Italy

From Pat Farenga:

On November 20-22 I spoke about homeschooling to an unusual audience. About 60 people working for a variety of institutions – people working for the European Economic Union, industrialists, university deans, philosophers, historians, and pedagogues – were gathered in Rome by the Nova Spes (New Hope) foundation to discuss the theme: "A Good: Culture. An Evil: The School. The school between structural and cultural problems." I was excited that many of the ideas we have explored in GWS, and that John Holt and Ivan Illich have written about in depth, would have an airing among policy-makers and thinkers outside the circle of people with whom I usually discuss these matters.

Nova Spes had invited me to participate after reading a paper called "Homeschooling: Creating Alternatives to Education" that I had presented at a conference at Penn State in 1997. I had originally thought I would present that same paper in Rome, but then I realized that it would not be so easy to get these complicated ideas across to people whose language I don't speak, especially in only 20 minutes or so. So I decided to focus on the issue of citizenship and schooling, titling my paper "Living As Learning: It Is Not About Fitting In." (This paper is available at our website, as is my earlier one.) I knew there would be questions about homeschooling, but I figured I would grapple with them during the lengthy discussion periods that followed the papers.

The conference was held in a hotel near the Vatican, in a building that was built in the 14th century. Hadrian's tomb, built around 119 A.D., was also nearby. The entire venue was imbued with a sense of history and tradition that made even "Colonial Boston" seem quite modern. The ability to balance the ancient with the modern was quite striking in Rome, but this tension became palpable to me on a personal level as the conference went on. Balancing the conservative, very-slow-to-change mentality of schooling with the fast, modern mentality of technological change quickly became a key sticking point for the attendees.

When it came time for me to speak, I was greeted with a reaction I didn't expect: shock. Many of the participants couldn't believe that schooling in the U.S. was so bad "that parents could do as good a job as the schools." One British participant acknowledged that homeschooling has a Constitutional right to exist, but argued that it is "a shame that people homeschool, and a double shame that *educated* people homeschool – I don't see how you're changing society by withdrawing from it." I replied that homeschoolers are withdrawing from school, not from society, and that we use society as the basis for our studies and explorations, not as some entity to be dealt with outside of school hours.

I think at least some conferees will now consider the possibility that

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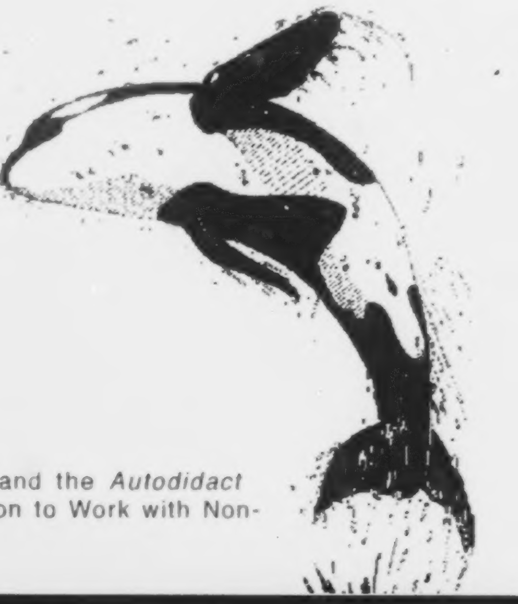

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homeschooling should have a place in the new Europe that is being created, but I understand even more now than ever why John Holt felt that schools were essentially incapable of major change. Most of the pedagogues felt that homeschooling may be fine for a few families but not for the general public. I often mentioned that I was not presenting a program to duplicate but a spirit to catch, examples to inspire, that there isn't just one way or schedule that makes everybody learn everything perfectly, but I'm not sure this message really was heard.

To a person, every presenter lamented the poor condition of schooling in their country (for instance, the German pedagogues referred to their education system as being too hierarchical and "a shambles") and stressed that students were clearly not engaged in their studies. Students went through the motions, passed their exams, but, these presenters noted, the students lack focus and direction. Many spoke about the need for a new "paideia" to engage students (paideia was the Greek concept of upbringing or pedagogy); some business leaders spoke about working more closely with schools to create work-school partnerships; some economists pointed out that Italy spends more money on education than any other EEU partner but was seventh among the EEU in education test rankings, so "money isn't going to solve schools' problems." I couldn't believe how similar these problems and proposed solutions were to what we've heard over the years in the U.S.. Since Europe is much farther along the road of compulsory national curricula, standards, and school certification for employment than we are, I feel even more strongly than ever that pursuing those policy goals in the U.S. will result in more of the same, rather than change. Indeed, as the discussion about the history and glories of paideia continued, I remembered Illich's observations about paideia. I paraphrased Illich in Rome, but here are his actual words: "Paideia was a high-minded ritual glorifying the difference between the free and unfree, namely, all those destined to be used." In other words, paideia assumed an undemocratic society, with

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rulers and people to be ruled, so it doesn't make sense to try to apply it to a democratic society.

Some people agreed with my comments, and a couple of the Italian members expressed interest in and appreciation for the "Renaissance" concept of teaching and learning that I presented. Nonetheless, homeschooling clearly has a long way to go if it is to grow in Italy and other European countries. We know that homeschooling is illegal in Germany, and I just heard from homeschoolers in France that a new law allows the *Inspector Des Academies* to have considerably more power to regulate homeschooling.

Indeed, it became quite apparent to me that the freedom we enjoy in the U.S. is rarer and more precious than I ever imagined. My trip to Rome had the odd effect of making me appreciate that our systems of school and government, flawed as they are, are better built to accommodate change for individuals and society than other democracies'.

Another benefit of this trip for me was that my 12-year-old daughter, Lauren, accompanied me, as did my father, who speaks Italian. While I attended the conference, Lauren and her grandfather toured Rome. One of the conferees, after meeting Lauren and my dad, commented that for him his time at the conference was educational but his touring of Rome was just fun. I didn't make this distinction, and neither did Lauren, who can't tell us where her fun stopped and her learning began during the trip. But it's clear that living as learning confounds most educators on any continent.

Office News

In GWS #123 we mentioned that Pat Farenga participated in a panel discussion about homeschooling, taped by National Public Radio's John Merrow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. At that time, we told you to check back with us about when the program would air. A note from the producer now says that the program has been aired in some parts of the country but, if you haven't heard it yet and want to, call the program director at your local NPR station and ask about it. The show is titled "The New Homeschoolers." You can also contact The Merrow Report at merrow@pbs.org

Calendar

April 24, 1999: BayShore Homeschoolers 5th Annual **Southern CA** Homeschool Conference at The Pointe Conference Center at CSU Long Beach. Mary Griffith and others speaking. For info: 562-434-3940 or BayShoreEdu@aol.com

April 23-24: John Gatto lecture and workshop in **Hartford, CT**, sponsored by Weaving the Wisdom, Inc. For info: 860-246-5700 or weavwisdom@aol.com

April 30-May 1: Wisconsin Parents Association 16th Annual Home Education Conference at the University Center in **Stevens Point, WI**. For info: 608-283-3131 or www.homeschooling-wpa.org ◆

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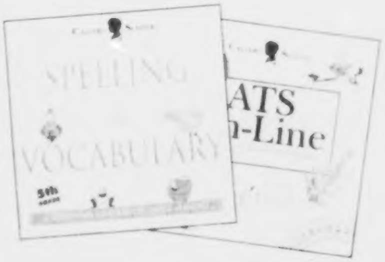


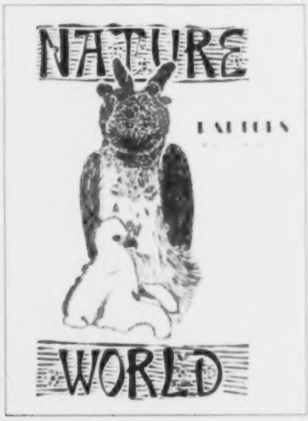
Young People's Newsletters

Editing and publishing their own newsletters is a way for these homeschoolers to learn more about all kinds of things – not just writing and editing, but also science, history, and much more.

About Wild Animals and Nature

Eve Monrad (CA) writes:

I publish a newsletter called *Nature World*, about wild animals and their habitats. I started it 3 1/2 years ago, the spring after I started homeschooling, following the idea my friend had of doing a newsletter about dogs. Dogs are a limited subject, though, and my friend quit after a couple of issues. I kept going, since animals and their habitats and a much broader subject. I don't think I'll ever run out of ideas for the next theme! Each issue has a theme, such as Lizards, Bats, Whales, the Ocean Floor, and Butterflies, to name a few. I've now published 13 issues. Each issue is 12 pages long and consists of articles, drawings, jokes sometimes, a crossword puzzle or dot-to-dot, book reviews, and a bibliography. It's a more-or-less quarterly publication now, although it started out being monthly 'til that proved to be impossible! As it is, issues are often kind of late getting out.



The basic production (which is very time consuming) starts with doing research on the topic. I go to the library and check out a lot of books (usually around 20!), I use the internet, go to museum exhibits, ask people about their personal experiences, and observe critters myself. We live in the country, so I can go around looking at lizards, or listening to bats in the evening, or watching butterflies in our garden. As I research, I start outlining the articles and planning what to put in the issue, as I learn more and decide what I want to tell people about. Sometimes (but not often enough!) readers will send me things, like drawings, stories, and magazine articles. When the article outlines are done, I start typing them into the computer, changing things as I need or want to. Then I print all the articles out and my mom edits them with me to correct spelling or fix a sentence that doesn't make *any* sense at all because I was thinking too fast when I wrote it. I don't lay anything out on the computer, partly because we don't have the right kind of software or a scanner to scan the drawings in. I cut out all the articles and drawings and glue them how I want them, write a few little things by hand, draw borders, and odds and ends like that.

While I'm in the process of typing, I work on the drawings too. Lately I've really been getting into doing more detailed, careful pen and ink drawings that are pretty big and can take one or two whole days of drawing, instead of doing doodles and sketches that clutter up the page, making it hard to read and look at. I love doing the drawings. Two summers ago I took a drawing technique class that taught me a lot about *how* to draw a nice drawing. Also, on the cover of the newsletter I have linoleum block prints that I carve. It's the one chance I get to do something *big*.

When an issue is all laid out, I take it to the copy store and make the copies, fold and put the address labels on them, and insert the little renewal forms into the right ones. I currently have between 45 and 50 subscribers, some of whom are adults, some kids. All of my cousins and friends get it and gradually people have given gift subscriptions to friends of theirs. In the future I would like to have more subscribers, partly so I could make a little bit of money for all the work I do (as it is now, it just pays for itself so I don't have to spend any of my own money) and also then maybe I could afford to take it to a professional printer instead of making copies which don't turn out as nicely as I would like them to.

The whole thing takes about one month of solid work, if I drop all the other "school work" stuff I'm doing during the process, which I usually do. It's hard work but I'm very proud of it and when I look back through the old issues, I'm always surprised at how they started out being sort of plain and small and have gotten so much better over time. The newsletter has gone from having articles that weren't very in depth, written by an 11-year-old, to having very in-depth information, more personal and less "copied out of the book" kind of stuff and more original, nicer drawings instead of clip art and doodles.

The hard part of putting out the newsletter, for me, is sitting down and just putting what I know onto paper. It always takes a long time to write an article. Even one that's only one page long (typed) will take me one or two whole days to write.

What's fun about doing all the research and writing the newsletter is sharing all the new things I learn with my readers. I'd rather write for that purpose than do research on something and write a report which I would stick in my desk and never look at again, or just read about a new subject and not write anything (which would make it hard to remember anything about it later on). Putting the research into a newsletter also gives me another reason to do that research and a structure in which to present it (and a deadline!).

For an issue of Nature World, send $1.50 to Eve Monrad, 7566 Eastside Rd, Healdsburg CA 95448.

About History

From Amy Saunders of Massachusetts:

My love for writing accelerated when my mom instituted a project (a family newsletter) when I was 13 that would enhance my writing and desktop publishing skills. Mom helped out a lot in the beginning, but soon I did a major part of the work alone. It started as a one-page newsletter and grew to four pages. It included a chatty letter from me, news items from family and friends, travel articles, biographies of different readers, anecdotes, jokes, reviews, and an annual survey. The best part for me was getting acquainted with family members, some of whom I'd never even met. *The Kindred Spirit* became famous, and people I didn't know would write asking to receive it. As a result, we had nearly 40 in circulation within the first couple of years.

Through this project, I learned that I really wanted to publish a magazine and I aspired to do so when I got older. However, daydreaming in the car one day, it hit me that I had no need to wait any longer to do a magazine. I had the power.

My original idea was a history magazine, though I tottered on the edge of doing a literary publication. I decided that literary magazines are, well, "done." There's nothing wrong with them, but I wanted something more unusual. Young adult history magazines are tough to find, and I thought if I could bring history out in an entertaining light, I might have something. After brainstorming, I dubbed it *Drawbridge*.

My love of history goes way back. I even liked it in school, and looked forward to Social Studies class. Part of this may be because of the history my family learned on trips to Appomatox in Virginia and the areas where my parents grew up in Tennessee and Virginia. I didn't always appreciate these trips at first, and I'm still trying to get back to Appomatox, but they were key in developing my sense of history. (Anybody remember when McDonald's still used Styrofoam containers?)

I wanted *Drawbridge* to be written by young adults as well as for them. Teen writing clubs on the Internet proved valuable for finding writers. To this day, an ad I placed in a well-known writer's resource site is where most of the writers found *Drawbridge*. I keep in contact with most of them by email, and since *Drawbridge* is theme-based, I periodically send updates on themes and deadlines. They all choose which issues to write for, and, because it's easier and has proven more effective, they choose which topic inside the theme to write about.

My knowledge of history has expanded since I've done *Drawbridge*. I've had to do more historical research to find themes that are unusual and interesting. I trust my writers to do their own research and to present the facts accurately, but if I'm unsure of something, I get in touch with the writer or check up on the facts myself. I also research to find extra information on the subject to fill the magazine.

Since the premier issue of July 1997, I have published seven issues. Some of the themes that have been covered are the Irish famine, spies of World War II, and the Aztecs. I keep a list of theme ideas and go through them until one strikes my fancy. For 1999, themes will range from local history to Japanese samurai.

I publish *Drawbridge* on 8 1/2 by 14 inch paper, using PageMaker 6.5. The circulation is still small, but selling advertising space has helped a lot. That leads to the greatest challenge – marketing. Advertising is a killer if you're on a small budget like me. With some ingenuity and heavy networking, I'm meeting the challenge without exploding my bank account. By connecting with other editors, I've spread the word and gotten some great ideas. The best marketing advice I've received is from an editor I met through the Internet. She told me about two ways to get noticed: one is ad trading, which I've put into practice, and the other is press kits – letting other magazines know about you, with the hope that they will publish that knowledge.

By publishing *Drawbridge*, I have learned better public relations skills. I have also learned to deal with deadlines, improve my writing and design techniques, and use the computer more effectively. It's satisfying to complete an issue. I love the process of making *Drawbridge*, and I have a lot of pride in my work. I devote my time and energy to every issue, getting as close to perfection as possible. Part of publishing is, however, knowing when to say "It's finished." You could edit until you die, and there would still be ways to improve it.

History is really fun, and textbooks usually hide that fact. I want to change that. And, so far, I'm reaching that goal. I try to keep the magazine upbeat by using a variety of articles. I like having at least one fictional piece per issue; historical fiction is a great way to make history enjoyable. Besides short stories, I've used poetry, and at some point I'd like to have a one-act play to publish. A couple of my writers who are also artists draw for me.

Because of *Drawbridge*, I'm now embarking on a new publication, a newsletter for teenagers in my surrounding area. I'm avoiding the many mistakes I've made with *Drawbridge* with this new publication, *Blabber Mouth*.

I feel that if you have a special interest in something and you're looking to share it, editing a magazine or newsletter is a great idea. The world needs some unique publications.

A girl who wrote for *Drawbridge* once said that history never gets old. That's how I feel. Underneath all of the atmospheric changes, people are the same. They have the same emotions and the same basic problems. That's why *Drawbridge*'s mission is to "Bring you into the lives of the men and women who made history." History is about people, and stories about people never get old.

For ordering info, see Amy's declassified ad at the back of this issue of GWS. ◆

Challenges & Concerns

Feeling Stuck

[SS:] A few weeks ago, I had a consultation appointment with a man who was considering letting his teenaged son leave school. We were talking about schedules and goals and plans – how a teenager, new to freedom, learns to make good use of his days. "What happens," the man asked at one point, "if we talk it out and agree on certain things that he's going to do that week, and then it turns out he hasn't done them? I'm talking about things he's going to *want* to do, not things I'm going to make him do. But what if it's harder than he expects or the week goes by and he just doesn't do what he said he wanted to do?"

"As long as he feels safe telling you that," I said, "it'll be OK."

Sometimes you find yourself saying something you didn't even realize you knew. But as soon as the words were out of my mouth, I saw that several experiences – my own and others' – had given rise to that generalization.

What I meant was that as long as this boy could tell his father – without fear of recrimination – that he was having a hard time, they would be able to work together to figure out what the problem was and what might be possible ways to address it. If, on the other hand, the boy felt that he had to make an excuse or bluff his way through the answer ("How did your week go?" "Oh, fine"), he'd be far less likely to face his own stuckness constructively and get help where he could really use it.

I've sat with kids new to homeschooling (or not so new, for that matter) on many occasions and listened as they've put forth plans. "I want to try to do some writing every day," they'll say, or "I keep having a hard time getting going in the morning; I lie around too long and then I don't feel good about it. I think I'll try making a list the night before of things I can do that day." "Great," I say. "Sounds like a good idea." But I also add, "And if you try it and it doesn't work out as you hoped, let me know." Let me know so I can help you figure out something else to try, so that you don't just feel stuck and then ashamed of not following through.

Recently I've been working on writing with Andrew, who's 13. He's an insightful thinker and quick with a response in conversation, but he's far less practiced at expressing himself in writing, and he knows it. His desire this year to work on writing was real but vague. He didn't yet have a clear or precise sense of what that work could actually be like. At one point, Andrew had gone home intending to make a rough start on a particular piece of writing and to bring me that draft the next time we met.

It didn't work out exactly that way. We met and Andrew didn't have the draft. He said, "I tried to do it but I just couldn't figure out how to start."

I could have seen that as an excuse, but instead I saw it as an opportunity. I really did believe that, given how little experience Andrew had with this kind of endeavor, he truly couldn't figure out how to start. So I talked to him about possible ways. I talked to him about what I do when I feel stuck. And the thing is, because Andrew had *tried* to start and then come up against a feeling of stuckness, he was able to hear what I was saying about rough drafts and first thoughts and organization in a way that he

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hadn't been able to hear when I'd talked about these matters in the abstract. By trying and then hitting that wall, Andrew actually *had* started on the essay, even if he didn't realize it at first.

I think of it this way: a musician could talk to me for hours about how to get a sound out of an oboe, but it would only be after I picked up the instrument and put it to my mouth and tried – however unsuccessfully – to blow a note that I would really be in a position to absorb the advice and to modify what I had done in light of that advice.

Because I see stuckness, and figuring out ways to get around or through that stuckness, as part of the process – any process, including the general process of figuring out how to organize your homeschooling time – I don't automatically take it as a bad sign when kids confess to feeling stuck. It would be worse if they felt they couldn't confess it or if they assumed that every stuck feeling meant they had to give up or turn back.

Forced Into School

Lynette Culverhouse of Massachusetts writes:

I have written to GWS a couple of times (as Lynette Tarkington, in GWS #110, 113) about how homeschooling became the major issue in my divorce. My ex-husband took me to court twice, claiming that the children were not receiving an education because my son's reading level was below his grade. The first time this issue came to court, the children were permitted to continue homeschooling. The second time, in 1997, when the children were 11 and 8, the court ordered them to attend school. The fact that my son came out well above grade level in every other test area did not seem to matter.

In April of this year we had a two-day trial which seemed to go very well for me. However, the court-appointed guardian ad litem recommended that the children be in school. He made this recommendation without speaking with the children, with my daughter's teachers, with my son's therapist, or with anyone from the homeschooling community who knew my children well. He also lied in his report and failed to report any of the volumes of favorable information he received in writing from people (including professionals) who know us. He is now under investigation for his clear bias against homeschooling in this case.

Meanwhile, my children are now in the middle of their second year in school. They dislike it and would like to return to homeschooling. In spite of this, they are doing well in school, getting all A's and B's on their report cards. Although this says nothing to me about their true gifts and talents, it does tell me that there was something about their homeschooling foundation that worked very well, since they have adapted to a difficult situation and still done well.

As I said, one of the arguments by their father was that my son's reading was not on grade level. Jason was a late reader and had been allowed to develop this skill at his own rate. I myself am a reading tutor and even though I reassured the court, the guardian, and their father that I had absolute confidence that Jason would

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be a competent reader in his own time, I was not believed. At a recent conference with his language teacher at school, we were told that he is now one of the best readers in the class and that he has insights and questions that go beyond what she would ever expect. Does this have anything to do with his homeschooling? I do believe that he is smart, but I also believe that children who are allowed to pursue learning in their own style and at their own pace develop a curiosity and a sensitivity well beyond their years.

Jason was so adamant about wanting to return to homeschooling that he wrote a letter to the judge explaining why he felt homeschooling was better for him than school. He wrote it after attending school for seven months. It was very moving to me that he had this much insight, but the judge was not moved by it, and in spite of all the evidence that came up at the trial showing that the children were doing better as homeschoolers, the judge still ordered them to school. The order is under appeal for its many inconsistencies and the judge's failure to consider the evidence. We have a good case, but it takes time, and meanwhile we have to live with school as best we can. I have learned a lot, and I hope my children have too.

Here is Jason's letter to the judge:

This was my idea to talk to you, not my mom's. I made this request because I want you to help me get back to homeschooling. I learn a lot better at home. Here are my reasons:

1. Reading. At home I read about a half an hour a day. At school we read only about twice a week for five minutes. My teacher thinks we read 15 minutes a day but no one does, because we do spelling, put our bags away and talk. Last year my reading improved so much and this year it hardly improved at all.

2. Math. Last year I got to do math that was a lot more challenging and for that reason it was a lot more fun. This year all the math is way too easy. Last year there were only four of us, and one teacher, my mom, and she could answer all our questions. This year there are 25 students, and a lot of times you raise your hand and don't have a chance to get your question answered.

3. Writing. I'm not so good at writing, and at school I just do it every day, but I don't get much help and it's not improving. With homeschooling, I'd be improving a lot more just because I'd have more help and we'd spend more time on it.

4. Geography. I'm interested in geography and we do absolutely no geography in school. I like looking at maps, memorizing state capitals, finding out where cities and countries are and which ones are bigger. Go ahead, ask me the capital of any state.

5. History. I'm interested in history, finding out the presidents and what they all did and the kings and queens of England and what they did. That's where my mom comes from. We only do American history at school. If I did homeschooling I could do history all over the world.

6. I never felt lonely at homeschool. I know a lot of other kids who do homeschooling and we do things together like plays.

7. The play. For the last three years, I've been in a play with other homeschoolers. It was lots of fun. I go together with my friends. I learned how to act. I got confidence getting up in front of people. I had to memorize a lot of lines. Every year in the play I've gotten better in acting.

8. Science. I like science but at school it's pretty boring. At first it was OK. We did eco columns, but we've been doing the same thing since the beginning of the year, and it lasted right through March.

School is really, really boring. They spend a lot of time discussing things I'm not interested in. Like the meaning of an easy word like "actually," and it interrupts the story right at the exciting parts.

Homeschooling is more relaxed and you aren't always worrying about getting a bad grade for your work. At homeschooling I can just think about what I'm learning. And I learn much more that way.

A lot of the time in school we just listen to the teacher talk. I think everyone is probably bored too.

I don't think anyone has the right to deny the worth of a homeschooling education. Many people before me have done it quite successfully, often more successfully. That's how it was for me.

Supportive Grandparents

Grandmother Opposes Homeschooling, Yet Plays a Valuable Part in Kids' Lives

Tara Ohta (Japan) writes:

Our children are blessed in having a super-fantastic grandmother. Since they were born, she has been a big part of their lives, doing all the loving things the best of grandmothers do. She has always given our kids a lot of one-on-one, sit-down-at-the-kitchen-table-together attention, often working on pre-reading and pre-writing skills with them.

Now that our daughter Rie is 7 and our son Gen is 5, though she may not realize it, *Baachan* (*grandmother* in Japanese) is a mainstay of our whole homeschooling scheme. I hesitate to point this out to her because I don't know how she would respond, since actually she is against our homeschooling. At least, she was when we officially started it in April of 1998. Although we took our children out of preschool and started homeschooling in September of 1997, we didn't have to get official sanction for it until April, which is the beginning of the school year here in Japan. Homeschooling is illegal here for Japanese people, but because our children are half American and half Japanese, they slip through a legal loophole and are allowed to homeschool as long as they are enrolled in some sort of correspondence school. My Japanese in-laws had never even conceived of the concept of homeschooling when I told them that I was determined to let Rie homeschool. It was quite a battle. Only because education is considered to be largely the mother's domain here, I somehow prevailed, for this school year at least.

My mother-in-law requested, though, that Rie study Japanese and math through Kumon, a learning method that is almost entirely drill and rote memorization. My mother-in-law promised to oversee it all. At first I was against it, but to appease my in-

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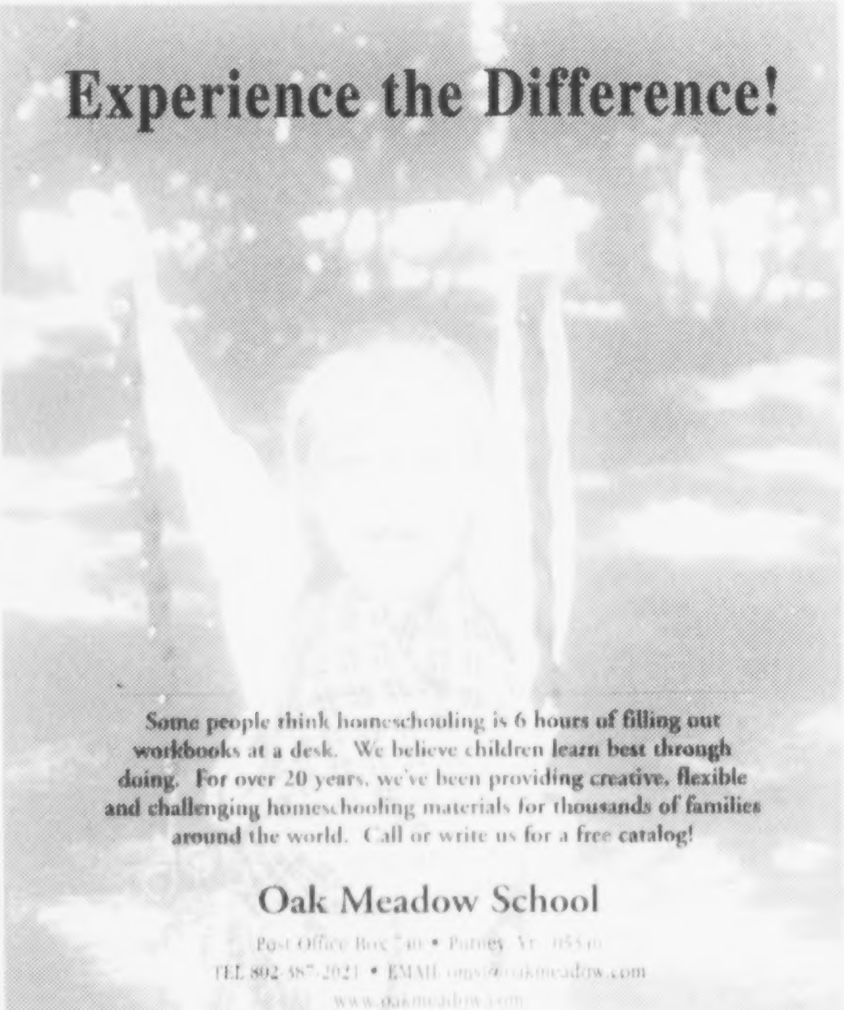
laws I agreed to let Rie try Kumon, and, after eight months of it, I'm glad I did. I don't think there is any other way but drill and rote memorization to learn the thousands and thousands of characters necessary to write Japanese, and I do want Rie to be completely bilingual. Also, I'm happy enough to have math taken off my hands. (I'm surprised that in spite of the endless number of math workbooks she does, Rie says math is her favorite subject. I suppose she likes it because the drills make her confident that she can do it well.) I am left to concentrate only on helping Rie with her English language skills, which is a pleasure to me.

Kumon's one-workbook-a-day-in-each-subject method has taught Rie, as we say, "to keep the seat of her pants on the seat of her chair." And because she's studying Japanese and math through Kumon, I suppose my in-laws must be reassured that Rie is learning the basics at least. But certainly the best thing about Rie's studying through Kumon is that her grandmother continues to be very involved in Rie's education, which has immeasurable benefits for our whole family.



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Worried, But Did Her Own Research

Cynthia Josephs of Illinois writes:

When my daughter began making noises about possibly homeschooling her 5-year-old twin boys, I very quickly focused on what had been a topic of mild general interest to me. Over the years I had heard that more and more parents were deciding to homeschool their children for many different reasons, but I had never paid much attention to what is clearly a growing tide of interest throughout the country.

As a grandparent I felt misgivings. How would the boys become socialized, how would they and their mom get along with so much togetherness, would they be able to keep up with their peers when the time came for standardized testing, would homeschooling make it harder to join the mainstream of public education at whatever time they did enter a public school, and, most of all, would they be happy?

I work in a public library, so the first thing I did was explore our database to find articles and books about homeschooling. I asked our children's librarians if they were working with any homeschooling families. I attended a library conference where there was a workshop on homeschooling presented by two moms. I talked to my daughter and son-in-law about why they wanted to homeschool the boys and the plans they had made to make it a successful experience for all four of them. I read the results of studies showing that homeschooled children did as well on standardized tests as did public school children.

Everywhere I turned I was reassured. Although I learned that there were many different reasons that motivate parents to turn to homeschooling, parents who have committed themselves to homeschool seem to feel comfortable about their choice and can become passionate about the progress and satisfaction that they and their children draw from the experience.

The ultimate proof turns up when I see my grandchildren thriving and learning. They are happy, unstressed, have many friends, and have learned that learning is fun. ◆

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Learning Through Play

Play is child's work, people say. Indeed, young children's play helps them make sense of the world, but older kids, teenagers – and adults! – can make play an important part of their lives, too.

Understanding Books Through Play

Anne Dixon of Massachusetts writes:

I have three children, ages 5, 8, and 10. I read to them a lot, and I have noticed that, especially when they don't think I am watching, they act out what I am reading as I read a book. They also continue this play after I finish reading, and often they change the endings or outcomes if they don't like the way it was written in the story. Another thing my oldest does in particular is to draw a picture of scenes in the story as she envisions them in her mind. The pictures are very accurate according to the wording in the book, as is the play that they all act out. All three children also make clay figures of the characters in the stories I read.

All of these activities make the children understand the story and make it more real to them. However, none of the activities is solicited by me. The children are, in fact, teaching themselves how to understand the story, and making it a part of their lives.

Inventing Math Games

Jennifer Millman Stockmeier (NY) writes:

Picture this. Me, a homeschooling mom exhausted and overwhelmed with the care of my new baby, born in September of my oldest child's first official homeschooling year. We had decided to homeschool Otto almost since the day he was born. Now with the obligation of reporting on his progress and being observed by those skeptics who find our ideas of unschooling interesting at best, I am feeling the pressure.

In July, I had proudly announced to the town school supervisor that Otto's curriculum would be child-led. At this point I am going on faith, my observations during the past six years, and the wonderful stories circulating among homeschoolers about how children teach themselves through play. I decide mine will too, and besides, at this point teaching is out of the question when just getting meals together and diapers changed and washed is enough of a challenge in these early baby months.

So as I snuggle and suckle my infant, I listen to Otto play. He is staring out a window at the back of our house saying things like "over two" and "now under five" and "back to nothing." This goes on for quite some time. He is completely absorbed, delighted with the game. My curiosity is overflowing; what on earth is he doing? What is he watching? Where are the numbers coming from? I say nothing and wait. Finally Otto comes to me, smiling, and announces that he is playing a really fun game. I ask him how he plays it. He explains that he is watching the cars that come in and out of town on the road that passes by the back of our house. Starting at zero – "nothing" – he adds every car that enters our town, and from that number subtracts the number of cars that leave town. So if 5 cars arrive when he starts to count and then three leave, he would be down to 2 and say "over 2." Another one coming would make it "over 3," another 5 cars leaving would then bring the number down to "under 2," and so on. I am amazed. My son is not only teaching himself the basic concept of negative numbers but is also establishing the mathematical foundation needed to one day balance a checkbook. Hurrah! We are on our way.

This happened in the fall of 1995. I knew right then that if I had attempted to teach negative numbers to him that day, I would never have captured his imagination or have invented as intriguing a game as he had created for himself. I did explain to him that what he had done was called negative numbers and I illustrated how that would be denoted using a number line (a concept he was already familiar with and used sometimes for adding and subtracting), in order to inform him of what he had just taught himself.

This experience has not only given me confidence and joy but has also become a reminder to me to listen to my children play and discover what they are learning.

At 16, Play Still Matters

Joanna Hoyt (ME) writes:

I don't play deliberately in order to learn academics.

(The idea brings to mind old school readers with grade-appropriate facts thinly coated with story.) But I do play, and my playing reflects and expands on everything else I'm doing with my life.

My early stories grew out of fantasies enacted with toys; when the stories I was playing became so fascinating that I didn't want to forget them, I wrote them down. Gradually the toys themselves became less and less important; my seashell collection became a nation of seals when I needed one, and a bag of marbles became a huge herd of horses in an enchanted canyon. By the time I was 11 I no longer felt the need to act my stories out, but while I was doing other things my characters would banter, argue, and tell stories with one another in my mind. These dialogues didn't actually get written into the stories I was working on, but they gave me a clearer sense of my characters.

When I wrote a story about a minstrel, I decided to read up on medieval England to give it a background; even after I abandoned the story as immature, the period fascinated me, and now another story is arising from my research. Work? Play? Study? Art? Maybe it doesn't matter what I call this.

I still do play in other ways. My younger brother and I have always acted out stories set in worlds that we read about in books. We never acted out the stories as they were written, but we took characters from the book-world and acted out other adventures that could have happened on the way. As we kept playing, the worlds mixed, and we came up with new lands and characters of our own. Now he is 12 and I am 16, and while the stories we play have grown more complex, they are still based in some of the same places and are still satisfying. We play simply because we enjoy it, although I think it satisfies several needs. We get to try on all kinds of roles and personalities. Our characters can argue furiously without either one of us being offended. We can explore questions like: What do you do when the world isn't really the way it looks to you? How do you know whom to trust? Is more knowledge always better? Bits of our formal studies also trickle in. Once we made a wagon from a plastic building set, draped a sheet over it and were pioneers. We played Politics for years, usually Senate, where we each played several Senators from different parties and with ties to various special interests, including wild duck protectors, chocolate producers and metalware manufacturers. As we watched debates and read about legislation we adopted parliamentary procedure and adopted rhetorical styles that sounded interesting. Now that we are learning Latin, in our play there are cryptic oracles who speak only that language. (Given our very limited fluency, we can't help but be cryptic!)

Playing for Fun, But Still Learning

From Zachary Host (ME):

When my family and I play games we do not play them because they are educational. We play them because we like to. But we still learn things quite often at the same time. For instance, when we play Anagrams we learn new words all the time, and when we play Balderdash (a dictionary game) we learn new words in almost every round. My grandmother says that all the games we play are educational, not just fun, but we actually enjoy doing them very much (her favorite game is Yahtzee).

Although all the games I have mentioned so far could be considered educational, we do play some games that definitely are not educational (Clue, Dutch Blitz etc.), and we enjoy them too. I used to have trouble with Clue and for a very long time I had a hard time with it because I would keep crossing off the wrong things and getting frustrated. Now I have gotten somewhat better at it.

The Value of Role-Playing Games

Peter Collopy of Ohio writes:

Five friends and I get together once a week to play role-playing games. A role-playing game is a game in which the players control characters, usually in a fantasy or science fiction setting. One player, called the gamemaster, controls all of the external effects on the players' characters, including other characters, monsters, animals, and even the weather. The other players each control one or more player characters who, in almost all role-playing games, go through various adventures.

The best-known role-playing game is Dungeons and Dragons. D & D was the first role-playing game and established many basic ideas and terms about role-playing. After D & D, many other fantasy role-playing games were created and, a few years later, the first science fiction games started coming out.

Combat between characters is resolved using dice. Although combat is an important part of the games, without interesting background they would be boring. This means that the gamemaster often designs a setting, which involves making maps and designing other parts of the world, including adventures, non-player characters, and various weapons and other equipment. Fantasy games often involve medieval language, especially in the names of weapons and clothing.

I think role-playing games are interesting because I get to be in someone else's world. This is similar to reading a book, but you have more control over what happens. When I read a book, I often wish that a character had done something different. In a role-playing game, you can take the story where you want. Although the gamemaster has ultimate control, characters often have much more control over the game world than their players have in the real world. This gives players a setting they can change and even at times reign over.

I find designing locations for adventures particularly interesting. Perhaps what we learn from this is similar to architecture. I designed, on graph paper, the home of one of my characters. It included a stable, and I had to research what the width of stalls should be to make it realistic.

Additionally, some players design their own games. For example, I recently designed a 20-page role-playing game based on C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This involved writing and determing what skills characters could use. It also involved writing short descriptions of each of the different races (humans, animals, supernatural creatures, etc.) in the *Chronicles*. I put it on a web page.

My friends and I arrange everything about when we meet, and we rotate among our houses. We do everything except transportation and snacks. The gamemaster leads the adventure for that day. Some people like to be gamemaster and do so often; others prefer to just play. Cooperation is important and is often necessary to complete adventures.

Play Reinforces Experience

Carolyn Koehler of Virginia writes:

One of my main reasons for not sending my children to school is so that they'll have more time to play. Everything they learn about seems to be somehow processed through play, and it's fascinating to see their play evolve as they grow (they're now 5 and 8). One thing I've seen many times is play serving to reinforce an experience; after a trip to a local history festival at which colonial militia reenactors were encamped, the kids used a bamboo pole and canvass tipi in our backyard to make their own soldier's tent. They equipped it with everything they had seen at the festival – bedrolls, candles, weapons, pans, etc. – and played militia for days. Likewise, seeing a local production of *The Sound of Music* led to weeks of making Austrian costumes for dolls, setting up scenes, and acting out variations on the show.

I've also seen play provide them with opportunities to try out new challenges. For example, composing and reciting poetry are not activities my children would embrace if I sat them down and directed them to do it. But in a dog show game they play, my daughter (the dog owner) makes up poems and teaches them to my son (the dog) to recite as part of his performance at the dog show.

And play definitely allows the children to work out their feelings about experiences, to come to terms with things that frighten them or make them sad or angry. Once we spent the day with the children of a friend who was transported out of her house on a stretcher for emergency medical care, and much of the children's play that day involved carrying dolls around on boards and careening around at ambulance speed.

These are all things that I suppose they might do if I suggested it to them. I might "trick" them into writing poetry by saying, "Why don't you make up a poem for your dog to recite at the dog show?" What amazes me about children's play, though, is that I don't suggest anything. They just do it. They listen to an interesting library book about dinosaur digs and then they play paleontologist, uncovering elaborate skeletons that they have created and covered. They see a bridge at a playground, and they play "Three Billy Goats Gruff," taking turns being the horrible troll and the victorious Biggest Billy Goat Gruff. They ask questions about why the von Trapps were leaving Austria, and then they devise schemes for capturing and killing Hitler.

Finally, writing and arithmetic have thus far been presented almost entirely through play. Starting at a very low level at about age 5, my daughter would ask me how to spell things for signs she wanted to make for some game she was playing. As she got better at printing, she expanded to games that included party invitations, vet records, and other things she wrote herself. Similarly, she records temperature or blood pressure for her vet patients; she measures and records weights and lengths for various games; and sometimes the dog in the dog show has to bark out answers to simple addition and subtraction problems she poses for him. Learning all the time!

Playing with Letters; Playing to Prepare for Geography Bee

From Karen Raskin Young (AZ):

At a recent homeschoolers' meeting, I described my children as being "bathed in language" from the time they were little, and I realized that may be one of the reasons we have never needed phonics or any other reading program. We read a lot, but we also play with words and letters and numbers and even colors from a really young age. We look at the words in books and we discuss the letters in alphabet books just as parents and young children often discuss the pictures in picture books. We notice and comment on letters as interesting events in themselves, as I would notice and comment about things happening down the street. I might say, "There's an F" in the same way I'd say "See the leaves blowing" or "Look at the kittens." Letters are just some of the things we see and talk about, without having to turn them into more complex reading lessons. As a result, Meredith now recognizes most letters, just as she recognizes kittens and leaves.

We sometimes bring out wooden letters and alphabet charts, but no more so than anything else we play with (except that reading books is a big chunk of our day because both children have asked for it). The point is that letters and words are part of our play from a very young age, not as lessons but as interesting parts of our world.

Another area in which play figured heavily was at the end of last year when we discovered with very little notice that Jeremy (13) would be participating in the first leg of the Geography Bee. Our homeschooling group had never participated in it before, and last year they only decided to do it perhaps a month before the bee, so none of the kids who chose to participate could prepare much in advance.

Geography was not an area Jeremy had studied extensively, and we had too little time to create a comprehensive study program. Instead, we whisked out every geography game we owned, including some we hadn't played in years and some we'd never yet made our way through. Either Jeremy alone or all of us together played these games in every spare minute. These fun two weeks (or "study program") were enough to earn a win at the local level and help him pass a difficult written test to qualify for the state bee, after which he did study more thoroughly (though still in a short period of time).

A Playful Attitude Helps Adult Work

Peter Bergson (PA) writes:

When I consider the relationship between work and play – and by play I mean to include a wide range of behaviors, including a playful attitude, fantasizing, wishing, silliness, experimenting/fooling around and the like – I'm reminded of the writings of people like Jean Liedloff (*The Continuum Concept*) who have explored various pre-technological cultures and have learned that many of these peoples have no language to distinguish between work and play. *Everything* is a potential source of joy, of self-expression, of creativity. Even the most mundane tasks are opportunities to be engaged in what we might call a childlike fashion. Whereas colonial Americans may have tried to *combine* work and play (as in a quilting bee or a barn raising/barn dance), people like Liedloff's Yequana Indians approached what we would call a totally playful attitude. One result was often a much greater sense of success, in process and final product. (Readers familiar with Liedloff's book will remember how this difference in approach was evident when it came time to portage the canoes through rough waters and over sharp and slippery rocks. Whereas the Europeans were grunting and swearing through the whole process, the Indians were laughing and giggling even as their ankles were cut on the jagged stone. The visitors looked at them as if they were too stupid to realize what a difficult chore they were facing, but for the Yequana, it was all in a day's – what? play? work? – life!")

This vice-president would use the assorted items in his desk to foster an absurd idea, and then he would allow himself to play with the idea, to roll it around in his mind as he let its benefits seep in, even grow.

As a consultant specializing in group creative problem-solving, I have had numerous occasions to observe adults in the context of their work life, struggling with their own versions of rough waters and jagged rocks, often cursing the obstacles before them to the point that they often lost sight of the purpose of their mission. Part of my message to these clients was, "Don't fight problems, play with them. And don't fight (compete) with each other and with each others' ideas – play with them, too. Tap into your imagination through your sense of fun, of joy, even of reckless abandon, just as you did as a child frolicking about on a sled or whipping around on a bicycle or spreading paint with your fingers. Relax, enjoy, and the ideas will come."

I sometimes used as an example a colleague's description of one of his clients who, as a senior vice-president of a Fortune 100 company, had a unique way of addressing particularly knotty managerial problems. For those times when his usual analytical methods failed to produce a solution, he kept a desk drawer filled with wild collections of hardware, recyclables, parts of old tools, and other pieces of assorted "junk." When he was really stuck for a new idea, he'd open his magical drawer and begin to pull out some of the items to play with until, inevitably, an image would begin to form in his mind that connected his playthings with the problem at hand.

More often than not, the image would be based on what we came to call a "Get Fired Solution" – an idea which, if implemented as is, would in fact solve the problem at hand but would do it in such a way that it would almost certainly get its implementer fired. (Such ideas were usually illegal, immoral, or outrageously expensive.)

This vice-president would use his assorted items to foster such an absurd idea, and then he would allow himself to play with the idea, to roll it around in his mind as he let its benefits seep in, even grow. And then, unlike most of the rest of the population, instead of "coming to his senses" and "getting back to the matter at hand," now that his daydreaming break was over, he would continue to hold onto his Get Fired idea. Slowly, at first, he would begin to modify it in a way that retained its essence and yet smoothed off the rough edges – made it more practical and, hence, implementable. More frequently than not, he was able eventually to mold his idea into an action plan that would address his needs in a novel way. In short, he recognized his ability to play *and used it* for mature purposes.

I have witnessed this same process at Open Connections, our homeschoolers' resource center, innumerable times over the past twenty years. Time and again the young people – whether 4 years old or 14 – would seem to be searching for a purposeful activity, or perhaps have a project that was temporarily stuck at a roadblock. All it took for them to get going was to spend a couple of minutes scanning the open bins of recycled materials and hardware, the assorted pieces of old games and toys, the popsicle sticks and scraps of leather or rubber that were arranged for their scrounging pleasure. Within a few moments, one could see the flash as a connection was made, usually while the children were physically playing with whatever had grabbed their attention.

At other times, I have observed the spontaneous generation of ideas in the midst of a kind of play that David Hawkins, of the University of Colorado, first referred to as "messing about." One of the areas in the Open Connections environment where this is particularly likely to occur is what we call our lab table, a very simple kitchen chemistry arrangement of plastic containers, test tubes filled with highly diluted food coloring, eye droppers, corn starch, and other assorted ingredients. Usually, a child new to our environment will begin by immediately dumping all of the colors into one bowl to make a sort of brownish pea soup. At some point, though, almost all children will ask for a new set of colors, which they will then combine in a more subtle manner, creating a vast array of new blends through both carefully planned and spontaneous experimentation.

I'm never quite sure what thoughts are drifting through the mind of a youngster as she goes on to mix up a batch of "poison" or "medicine," or pours the colored liquid into a cup of cornstarch to form a goopy mixture that can then be spooned, rolled, dripped, or left to settle out and eventually dry up, thereby producing a new texture for more explorations. Whether the sense of playfulness is driving a sense of inquisitiveness or vice-versa is hard to say; maybe, as for the Yequana, the two motivations are indistinguishable. In any case, what frequently follows one step in the process is another step that can lead to more questions, further exploration, and even an entirely new direction.

For example, I've seen how, after handling a fistful of slippery cornstarch, a young scientist will seem to be captured by the visual image and will make the mental connection to other gooey white substances, such as Elmer's Glue, which would then be added to the mix. From there, questions sometimes emerge, such as, "Why is this one sticky and the other one slippery? What makes one thing a lubricant and something seemingly similar a fastener?" Perhaps the words aren't always so elaborate, but the questioning process is surely this sophisticated.

To me, this type of inquisitiveness, so totally self-initiated and self-directed, lies at the heart of the scientific mind that teachers claim to be the goal of science education. It is the antithesis of the typical lab experiment found in school curricula, in which the student is directed how to think and what to think about. I personally remember quite clearly being asked in a lab report, "What color bubbles did your experiment produce?", to which I responded in my mind, "Bubbles? I didn't get any bubbles! Was I supposed to get bubbles?" Of course, I then turned to my friend and asked what color bubbles he got and wrote that answer on my sheet. It never occurred to me to ask (and seek an answer to) the question, "Why didn't I get any bubbles?"

I suspect that I was not alone in my subjugation of any personal agenda to the more important task at hand, which was to get the right answer for the write-up. And I know that I was not alone in realizing that any attempt to *really* experiment, let alone play with the mixture, would be totally out of line. *Fun* was not the purpose of this activity. Today I maintain that neither was any true scientific inquiry, and that both fun and inquiry died together.

I recently asked my eldest daughters what, if any, connections they saw between their years of play in their self-created world of Dolltown as children and their current adult lives. Without hesitation, Amanda (now 22) identified the value of the dolls' Town Council as being the source of her current motivation to "let all voices be heard, even if you don't agree with what they are saying." This attitude, I can attest, is reflected in many of our dinner table conversations whenever highly controversial topics come up for discussion (which is more often than not). Emily (now 20) was equally quick to make a connection, identifying her organizational skill as having its start in Dolltown. Always fascinated by real tools and real (meaning adult) materials, Emily would spend hours filling out the recycled doctors' forms which Dolltown had inherited from a friend.

For all four of our children, Susan and I have seen how their play has led to the development of skills and interests that now serve them well. Had we tried to teach them these same skills in games which we had contrived for the very same purpose, I highly doubt that we would have seen the same measure of achievement. Surely it was their own intrinsic sense of play and enjoyment that led – and continues to lead – to the discovery of new and useful skills and abilities in all aspects of life. ◆

See our interview with Steven Caney, on the following pages, for more on thinking creatively and solving problems, and see p. 28-29 for some books in our catalog that focus on play.

Children's Book Artist Says: Dream On

Marilyn Bohren of Louisiana sent us an article from her local newspaper about the children's book author and illustrator Tomie dePaola. Some excerpts:

Now 63, dePaola was a mere preschooler when he set out to become an artist and writer. Born in Meriden, Conn. to an Irish-Italian family, he recalls long hours spent drawing, often between the sheets of his bed with a flashlight, book, and a special pencil given to him by his grandfather.

"When I told my parents I wanted to be an artist, they really believed me and made sure I had paper and paints and all the art supplies I needed," he said.

... dePaola is a big advocate of doodling and daydreaming, and recently told a group of reading teachers that the two should be included in the educational curriculum.

"It's looked at as wasted time," he said. "Children aren't given time to daydream anymore, and if they don't daydream, they don't develop their imaginations. I doodle and daydream a lot. That's how I come up with my ideas."

... He also has some wisdom for parents: Don't worry about formal art lessons, but make sure your children have plenty of art supplies, along with time to dream up ideas.

"Children are so programmed, taking this class and that class," he said, "that they have no time to walk in the woods, or sit in a meadow or watch the chipmunks."

What is Creativity?

An Interview with Steven Caney

Designer Steven Caney is the author of *The Invention Book*, *Kids' America*, and other books that might *seem* to be primarily for a young audience. But what Steven Caney has to say about invention, creativity, and getting unstuck applies broadly – to play, to making things, to solving life's problems. In this interview, he talks about what encourages and discourages creativity, how to get unstuck, and – perhaps most important – how to avoid being limited by narrow assumptions.

Susannah Sheffer: What does creativity mean to you?

Steven Caney: The ability to generate many options so you can pick the one you like best. Creativity has many definitions because it was once only attributed to the performing arts. There was no such thing as being creative in business or, really, any other trade or profession. Today, just about everyone has the opportunity to be creative in what they do.

I think as kids we all start out as divergent thinkers, always looking for more and more options, and then at some point we're coerced into thinking that we have to be convergent thinkers, always having to look for real solutions. Once an adult has a good idea, playing games to think of other options is not usually tolerated. But when you have a problem to solve, the more options you have, the closer you'll come to finding the one that's a perfect fit, the creative ideal solution.

When someone is stuck and looking for a creative idea, they often seem to be looking up into space, waiting for an idea to drop out of the sky. I don't think that process is very likely to result in a range of ideas. But on the other hand, if you have a process, a way of thinking, that enables you to generate many options, you're in better shape. You want to think of metaphors and analogies, you want to look around you at all the available clues. You know how to trick yourself into thinking of things you wouldn't have thought of otherwise.

SS: What's an example of that?

SC: Suppose I'm a child who wants to create a burglar alarm to keep my brother out of my room. That's the problem I want to solve. So I look at everything around me and say, "How could this do it?" If I see a balloon, I ask myself, "How could a balloon be a burglar alarm?" Maybe I'll make something that pops and scares my brother and also lets me know that someone has been in my room. In other words, you take everything you see or think of, and you try to force fit it into a solution. It's crucial to note that in order to brainstorm successfully, you have to have a problem to solve. If I say to you, "Think of all the things that are green," that's pretty meaningless, but if I say, "Think of a way of keeping your lawn green," that gives you a problem to work on.

SS: What are some of the common blocks or obstacles in the way of creativity?

SC: Being limited to one particular perception of an idea is one of them. When I was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, my first photography instructor asked the class to go around the block and photograph all the number 6's we saw. We found all the house numbers, license plate numbers, even numbers on telephone poles, and but when we came back to class, we were just sent back out and told we must have missed some. He was right; we could have been more observant, and we found a few more, but that still wasn't what he was looking for. He sent us out a third time, and finally, someone made a shadow out of his body that looked like a 6. Another wrote a 6 in the dirty hood of a car. We found a "VI" for the roman numeral 6. And we found that our first definition of a "6" had been limited by our initial assumption, and once we realized that a 6 could be something we created ourselves, it opened up enormous possibilities.

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SS: You said we start out as divergent thinkers but then we're taught that it's not acceptable. How does that happen?

SC: Kids are, as I'm sure your readers know, trying to mimic adults. If they see that adults are not experimenting, using things in different ways, etc., then they begin to think that those behaviors are childish. When the adult starts to demand reality instead of fantasy, or wants to show the child how to do it the adult way, the "correct way," all the time, it closes off a lot of the child's practice in creative thinking. And nowadays there's pressure on a child to be creative. It's not uncommon now for parents to brag about how creative their children are. But if children are explicitly told that certain toys or materials are purchased for them in order to boost their creativity, the whole natural process becomes somewhat muddled and confused. Now they have to think: are they doing creativity right? I think most adults want to quickly see the end result – a creative drawing, poem, etc. – but they have a harder time letting their kids go through the experimentation process that builds that result. And sometimes adults say that want to see creativity but they tend to judge a child's work by their own narrow definition of what that means.

SS: You mean, valuing only a certain kind of poem or drawing?

SC: Here's a story. Several years ago I was called by the Dunkin' Donuts people to judge their annual art contest for kids. Somewhat naively, I showed up to find it was actually a coloring contest; these were pre-drawn pictures of the Easter Bunny, and coloring submissions from all the regions of the U.S.. As I was thumbing through the piles of submissions, with P.R. people leaning over my shoulder, every once in a while I would pull one out of the pile. The head of the P.R. firm said, "Oh, those are the ones you're rejecting?" I said, "No, these are the ones I'm accepting." "But everyone went out of the lines in those!" he said. "Yes," I said, "they all added something to the drawing. They all created more than what was there." Well, there was a little huddle among the P.R. people and then I was dismissed. Clearly what they had wanted was the neatest drawing, and certainly one that stayed within the lines.

SS: So, on other hand, what supports creativity?

SC: I think sometimes all you really need to do is surround children with an enormous amount of materials in a space where they feel comfortable doing whatever they want with those materials. When I was a young child, I used to be sent to my grandparents' house frequently to play. I loved it, because my grandfather had a workbench in the basement full of glorious materials and tools; he had old cigar boxes filled with all kinds of parts. I'd dump them out on the workbench and start figuring out what went with what, what fit together, without having anything particular in mind. Sometimes after I built something, I would figure out what I thought it was supposed to be. So, picture me at about age 4, standing on a box so I could reach the workbench, hearing my grandfather's footsteps coming down the stairs. He would ask me, "I'd like to see what you've built," and almost always, even before I had a chance to respond, he'd say, "Oh, I was just reading about that in the newspaper," and right away he'd invent a story about what I was doing: "Steven Caney builds the first whirl clicker," or something like that.

That's the kind of encouragement that says to kids, "What you're doing is important."

SS: And while you were still experimenting, he didn't put pressure on you to come up with a specific idea of what the end result would be.

SC: We both just came up with speculations: maybe it's this, maybe it does that. We thought of all the things it could possibly be.

Another thing that supports a child's creativity is for the child to see an adult in a creative situation, which means taking the time to generate a lot of ideas with the thought that when we find the right one, we'll recognize it, and also with the understanding that during the brainstorming, no ideas are rejected. When it's time to select one of the options, you don't reject a child's idea just because it's impractical. For example, you might say, "That's a good idea, now let's see how we can make it do such-and-such."

Also, any time a child does an experiment, there's always some aspect of it that succeeded. Most adults think in terms of sucesss or failure, either/or. But you can point out what part of the idea or activity or construction was successful.

For example, I was working with a class in New Hampshire on the invention process. One girl wanted to create "the world's best kitchen fly catcher." Her original idea was to hang a piece of cheese from the ceiling, leave the room, return to find flies on the cheese, and reach up with a book to swat them. Well, when she came back the next day with her report on how it had gone, she said it had totally failed. It turned out that the flies did get attracted to the cheese, but when she tried to sneak up on them with the

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book, they flew away. I said, "That doesn't mean it failed! A lot of it succeeded –the cheese part worked." When she realized that, she became enthusiastic again, and she ended up creating a brilliant invention in which she bent open a paper clip, hung a piece of cheese on it, and lowered it into the kitchen sink drain. When flies were attracted to the cheese, she would turn on the water and get rid of the flies!

So, when *you're working with a* child on a project, if they get discouraged because nothing seems to work right, you need to look back at the work that was done and find the places where they were successful.

SS: Of course, I'm immediately thinking that this applies to adults' projects as well, and also to the process of helping kids figure out what they want to do with their time. I'm frequently talking with young people about ideas they have of things they want to do, and I know what you mean – it's too easy sometimes to say that the whole idea is unworkable, instead of asking, "What part of this does work?"

SC: Creativity is really a metaphor for life. If you give yourself the opportuniy to look at any situation with the idea that you will generate as many options as you can and then make a choice, you are much less likely to feel stuck.

What usually inspires us is that we have an idea that is exciting enough to us that we decide to take some action: *we sketch it, we tell somebody about it,* we try to build it, whatever. When we take that action, it inevitably results in some form of conflict: we discover that something like it already exists, or we find that you can't really make that work that way. Very few ideas work out on the first try. What many people attempt to do, after that disappointment, is to give up or compromise with a less exciting idea. But there's usually much less enthusiasm for the compromised idea than there was for the original idea.

Instead of compromising, what you can do is apply the creative process to get unstuck. If you can take the figurative walk around the block looking for all the other number 6's, you'll find that maybe there's another way of looking at the problem.

I can't remember who it was who said, "If it wasn't for problems, the day would be over by noontime." We spend our day going through problems that need to be solved, and we tend to try to solve things the same way we did before, rather than taking the time to generate new options.

Here's an example of how you can expand your thinking by defining the problem in another way. As an exercise, I told half my class, "I want you to think of ideas for better toasters." To the other half of the class – who hadn't heard the assignment I gave to the first half – I said, "Come up with ideas for bread-browners of the future."

The first half had the image of a toaster so strongly in their minds that they all came back with adaptations of a box with slots. The other half, who had been told the word "bread-browner" instead of "toaster," came up with ideas like spraying edible paint on stale bread, using a magnifying lens to

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catch the sun, etc. They were less limited by the preconceived idea.

SS: So people are more likely to invent something really new if they go beyond preconceived ideas. What else do you think supports inventiveness?

SC: For many years I taught invention at the college level and at the primary and secondary levels. I used to teach that the process was: you come up with ideas, you pick the one you like best, give it a name, and go through experiments to try to make it work. But then I was hired to work on the development of the Inventors Hall of Fame in Akron, Ohio. I began to realize there was a more typical way creativity and invention take place. In the course of that project, I interviewed several inventors. When I asked about their process, that baffled virtually everyone; no one felt they had used an invention process. But what they did describe fit into a pattern so universal that among hundreds of inventors *I have yet to find an exception.*

What they said was that in getting the idea or solving the problem of their invention, they discovered a phenomenon and saw how that would allow their invention to work. A simple example of this is the invention of Velcro. A guy was walking through the woods and getting burrs stuck on the legs of his pants. He was curious about why they stuck, so he looked through a magnifying glass and saw that the burrs had little hooks which attached to the fabric of his clothing. Seeing that phenomenon gave him the "eureka!" that he could invent a fastener that worked the same way, to use instead of zippers.

SS: It's interesting to think about how observations like that often come about by accident; it's not as if people always know specifically what they're looking for.

SC: Many inventions are the result of serendipity or mistakes. Chocolate chip cookies were a mistake: a baker was trying to make vanilla and chocolate marble cookies but she didn't have the right kind of chocolate that day and the pieces of semisweet chocolate she used didn't melt. She was going to throw them out, but one of her patrons demanded them and loved them.

So if you're going to encourage children to be inventive, I've found that teaching them to be observant of phenomena is a much better way to do it than saying, "Think of things you need," which is what I used to do. Now, I sit down with kids and a bunch of scrap material and say, "Let's just see what this stuff wants to do." Some things just seem to fit together, and, as you're exploring, you make interesting discoveries, or you look at what you've made and ask yourself, "What can this do?" or "How can this solve my particular problem?"

I can hold a cup up in front of a group and say, "What is this?" and they'll all say, "A cup." If I say "What else is it?" there's only a trickle of ideas. But if I say, "How would you turn this into a disguise? How would you use this to protect something? How would you make this a game?", then everyone will have ideas. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Homeschoolers' Craft Fair

Andy Migner (MA) writes:

Our annual Homelearner's Family Craft Fair is an event that I think John Holt would have appreciated. It's "work worth doing" and an opportunity for children to work alongside adults, learning from them while not specifically being taught. In fact, the fair was not originally intended for children at all. Perhaps that is one reason it has been so successful.

It began with a dozen creative adults interested in selling their crafts and making some money. Holt urged adults to follow their own passions and develop their own skills and said that often, adults' enthusiasm is contagious. This, I think, is how the craft fair evolved from an opportunity for homeschooling parents to sell their fine crafts to a fair combining fine crafts, family crafts, and children's crafts.

That first year, one of the vendor's children (aged 6) taught people how to make little fleece lambs. This was so well received that it inspired the inclusion of children in future craft fairs. The children have so enjoyed this creative and entrepreneurial opportunity that at our recent fair, seven years later, we had almost twice as many child vendors as adult (30 children/16 adults).

Sal and Elizabeth Alonzo at the fair.
Photo by Linsey Hurley

After the first fair, some folks were discouraged by the low turnout. Planning and advertising had been minimal. In recent years, in order to locate and secure an adequate space, planning has begun six months in advance. Invitations to vendors are extended about four months prior to the fair, and we publicize the event thoroughly, both to the general public and to the homeschooling community. A committee of about ten people who divide up the tasks (of chairperson, site coordination, advertising, vendor registration, recruiting and scheduling entertainment, food, decorating, set-up and clean-up) works well. With fewer people, we've found that there is a greater probability of one or two people being overburdened.

All of the vendors are encouraged to create quality craft items and to display them artfully. The fair takes place during the regular pre-holiday craft fair season (usually a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving) and looks in most ways like any other festive holiday craft fair. What makes ours unusual is the age range of the vendors (5-80 – yes, this year we thought to include grandparents!) and the free entertainment that is offered throughout the day by both adults and children. Performances over the years have included solo, duet, and group vocal and instrumental musical pieces, storytelling, magic shows, dancing, and even a heartwarming clown act by a talented 6-year-old.

As at many craft fairs, food is sold. What is special about this food is that it is conscientiously created and served by (for the past three years) a homeschooling father and his children.

The fair holds different rewards for different people. Some of the vendors are clearly artists or craftspeople and the fair is an opportunity to showcase and sell their wares. For others, the fair provides the impetus to create, motivated by the desire to make money. My sons, for example, are not normally drawn to making crafts. But months before the fair, ideas begin to percolate. They pay attention to what has and hasn't sold well in the past. And then there is the real-life math. In addition to making change for customers, these entrepreneurs must take into account the cost of renting a table, and of their time and materials, before determining the selling price of their wares.

Browsing and shopping at the fair provides an opportunity to learn how various crafts are made. Some of the vendors, rather than selling their wares, demonstrate how to make their craft and charge a fee for materials so that customers can make their own creations.

And then there are those of us who return to the fair each year because it is uplifting and fun. We like to support the talented and hardworking vendors while also buying gifts for the holidays. We enjoy the entertainment and the special privilege of witnessing the awesome and growing talent of our (collective) children. While doing all of this, we celebrate the (often difficult) choices we have made, specifically the decision to learn and grow together as a family.

Son Loves Math, But Mom Doesn't Push It

Sue Smith-Heavenrich (NY) writes:

My younger son, Toby, is a math wizard. We call him "the human calculator." He's the one I ask, while waiting in the checkout lines, to calculate subtotals and tax. He's the one I go to when I can't remember whether 9 x 6 is 54 or 58. He loves huge numbers, figuring out mazes and codes, and playing with tangrams. In short, he has a passion for math.

When a child shows talent, whether in academics, athletics, or arts, our natural impulse is to encourage her to explore her limits. After all, she might be the next Picasso or Poet

Laureate. We create opportunities for our children to stretch their imaginations and push themselves to higher skill levels. We shuttle them from one after-school activity to the next. I remember one afternoon I'd taken the children to karate and was chatting with another mom. Her children were a few minutes late because they'd been in a youth symphony rehearsal, and they still had a youth group meeting to attend later that night. When did they just have time to be? I asked myself.

It's tempting to push our talented children. But we need to remember that they are children, and no matter how brilliant they are, they still need time to be just kids.

Which is why I didn't order a math book for Toby this year. Last year, while technically in second grade, he completed a third grade course of math study. This year we're taking a break from math. Or so I tell Toby. Instead of reviewing addition and subtraction, we're taking nature walks to learn about shapes of leaves, and counting flower petals and looking for patterns. This year we are intentionally slowing down. We're going to do less and learn more.

We began this fall by looking at geometry in nature. What a great excuse to go for a walk each day, collecting leaves of different shapes, looking at spirals in sunflowers and pine cones, discovering Fibonacci numbers in the purple coneflowers and wild daisies. Toby learned to use a compass and protractor so he could draw and color geometric designs. He created a base-7 math system for aliens with three fingers on one hand and four on the other.

Winter gives us a good excuse to hang out in the cozy warm kitchen with mugs of hot cocoa and play algebra games, snip out paper snowflakes, explore codes, and puzzle out winning strategies for all those Nim games we play. We hope to play around with three-dimensional shapes and explore color and geometry through quilt designs.

And spring? I'm hoping for good weather so we can learn the harmonics in skipping stones across our neighbor's pond. And, I confess, learning the long division chapter that

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we never did last year.

More than one person has voiced concern to me that I should "quit messing around" and help my son "get ahead of the crowd." There is a big push in our local schools to do more math, science, and technology. Even homeschoolers get caught up in this. Like most other parents, we feel guilty if we think we're somehow depriving our children of opportunities to excel. But for elementary aged kids (and maybe even high school kids), the important thing isn't to impart X amount of knowledge. It's that we imbue in our children a sense of wonder, curiosity, and desire to learn. About math or anything else. Sometimes to do this we need to step off the fast track and walk out the door and see how math connects to everything in the universe.

Cool books I'm using as resources: *Math Wizardry for Kids* by Kenda and Williams; *Family Math* by Stenmark, Thompson, and Cossey; *Beginning Algebra Thinking for Grades 5-6*, by Goodnow; *The I Hate Mathematics! Book* and *Math for Smarty Pants*, by Marilyn Burns; *Math and Writing Games*, by Herbert Kohl.

Traveling with the Family

Lucy Mitchell of New Zealand writes:

Since we were very young, my parents have, often literally, given my sister and me the world. Whether it was talking to the Swiss and German visitors to our small New Zealand farm, sampling exotic fruits in a Malaysian market, or navigating our motor home through the dry plains of west Texas, they have endeavored to provide as wide a range of stimulating learning experiences as possible.

But I think it was only after I left the formal school system when I was almost 12 that I really began to realize just what I had been given. And then, two years later, when we packed up (again) and left our island in the South Pacific for destinations unknown, more amazing opportunities were opened to me.

What exactly possessed my parents to pack away all their worldly possessions but for what could be carried in four backpacks and take a 13- and 9-year-old off on the trip of a lifetime, I am not sure I will ever completely understand. But that's what they did, and in October 1993, when I was two months shy of my 14th birthday, we headed off into the wild unknown.

Ok, so maybe the wet and wild Oregon coast was not quite as rough as the Afghani frontier where my parents had traveled and met, and maybe our motor home was equipped with more comforts than some houses we had lived in, but spending seven months in the U.S. and then another two in Canada, with the four of us in a 27-foot motor home, was a fair achievement.

Although I had some structured learning during this time through The New Zealand Correspondence School, I found the work ridiculously easy and often boring and annoyingly time-consuming. Who wants to be reading about fractions and decimals when the real-life site of the Alamo is right on your doorstep? So the correspondence work took a backseat to what was happening around me, and, like a lot of independent learners, my sister and I had our math in more practical occurrences: calculating distances traveled and money to be exchanged, for example. We heard Spanish on the southwest border and French in Quebec; we met people who were more interesting by far than the ones in my Social Studies texts. We visited penpals of mine and my sister's, other homeschoolers and friends along the way.

As if there was not enough history around us to satisfy the most scrupulous of school inspectors, I devoured James Michener's *Texas*, *Alaska*, and *Centennial*, and as a family we read *Miles from Nowhere* and John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*. History, though, was an easy subject to satisfy, as we had to stop Mum from reading every single "historical marker" on the continent. There were Missions in Santa Barbara, mines in Bisbee, the Alamo in San Antonio, and many other points of interest along the way. In seven months we crossed the North American continent three times, visited about half of the states, and learned more than we ever would have in school.

When we got to Montreal, where we were to live (although we did not know it at the time) for three years, there was the challenge of fitting into a different culture, adapting to a place that spoke about 180 languages, and soaking up the atmosphere of a city 460 years old – but not rushing it.

The best part of living in a big city, in my opinion, was the culture. Although Mum would perhaps say that I was reluctant at times to do anything educational, this was mostly because I was 14 and tired of doing things with my family. But we did "do" an occasional museum, biodome, science center, planetarium, botanical garden, ballet, theatre, concert, Shakespeare in the park, and of course (you can't live in Montreal without it) several hockey games. I picked up a passion for hockey and spent hours each October poring over the statistics of the teams for the upcoming season and trying to predict, via the stats of last season, who would be triumphant.

So, in all this time, my sister and I, and certainly Mum and Dad, got more than our fair share of history, natural history, math, languages, cultural immersion, and geography.

Coming-of-Age Ceremony for 13-Year-Old Boy

Karen Raskin-Young (AZ) writes:

In response to the Focus on "Creating Our Own Ceremonies" in GWS #125: When our son Jeremy first heard of Bar Mitzvahs, he said he'd like to have some sort of special ceremony to commemorate his turning 13. The idea of his being a "teenager" didn't appeal to us since we don't like much that is associated with that term, and he felt strongly that he was still a child and didn't want to be rushed into growing up. Still, it did seem that he was crossing some threshold, and so we invented a ceremony that was small, personal, and surprisingly meaningful.

I asked Jeremy to write up a small speech about his life so far and where he was going. I wrote one, too, and we read these at the beginning. Then I read Rudyard Kipling's "If," a poem about growing up that Jeremy had never heard before, and it gave him much to think about. Finally, I spoke some words, and Jeremy crossed over a simple but symbolic line to join his father and me. It was very moving and had the weight of an age-old ritual.

Now 14, Jeremy is more comfortable being in his teens, seeing this period as something he can define for himself (not as a stereotyped teen), and, different from a year ago, he says he now feels he has one foot in childhood and one in adulthood and is making his way somewhere in the middle (very nicely, I might add). I've been so pleased with that ceremony that I expect to enact one for my daughter when she is Jeremy's age and am planning one for my own significant birthday next year.

Jeremy comments:

I was about 6 or 7 when I learned that some people had Bar Mitzvahs but that I wasn't going to. I didn't like this; after all, at that age I didn't want to miss out on *anything*. My mother and I agreed that we'd do Something Special on my 13th birthday.

The first idea I had for what that grand Something should be hit me one day when I was around 8. My father came home from work and announced that there would be a meteor shower that night. He suggested that we go up to a local mountaintop and watch it, and, although we finally elected not to go, the idea stayed close in my mind. I decided that on my 13th birthday I wanted to drive up that mountain and watch the meteors – my special thing revealed.

Reality check: there aren't any meteor showers on my birthday, and by the time I was the designated age, we had moved away from the mountain and my mom had a new baby, meaning we couldn't have made the hike, anyway. No matter. We had quite an interesting little ceremony, after which I reailzed I was – YUCK! – a teenager, and cried on my father's knee. I'm still a little scared to be in my teens, but I guess I've grown into it more. My problem about being a teenager isn't that I feel I have to be typical – I know I don't. It's more that getting older means taking on more responsibility, and also brings me one step closer to adulthood, the time when I'll have to be fully on my own and not have my parents there to fall back on. It's not a matter of stereotypes but of responsibility. Anyway, I'm growing into it rather well.

Studying History Critically

More from Karen Ruskin-Young:

Jeremy and I have been using a series of books by Kevin O'Reilly called *Critical Thinking in United States History* (available from Critical Thinking Press and Software). The books cover aspects of history from colonial through modern times (including some odd topics such as the 18th century Cult of Womanhood or the Roanoke colony or the meaning of constitutions) while, at the same time, teaching critical thinking. We especially like reading parts of original source documents or evaluating various historians' analyses of events. As a result, we never view historians' work or reports of current events in the same uncritical way we might have before; we consider validity of sources, corroboration, and logic of arguments.

These books have led us in an unexpected direction, too. I was dissatisfied with some of Jeremy's answers to essay questions, and when he didn't seem to understand my objections, I began to write along with him. This has turned into a splendid experience. I don't actually critique his answers unless I think they are factually wrong or are much too brief (the latter problem went away as soon as we began writing together). We are writing partners, each having the chance to see the other's answer and style of writing. Sometimes Jeremy's answers are longer; sometimes mine are. Sometimes his anwers are more thoughtful or better-worded or raise more interesting points; sometimes mine are more interesting. Jeremy's writing is better now, and he has more ideas about how to tackle an essay question. We've also really enjoyed thinking about history and sharing our thoughts, which makes the history more personal and memorable. ◆

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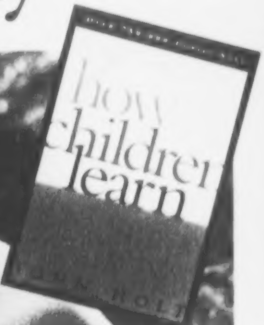

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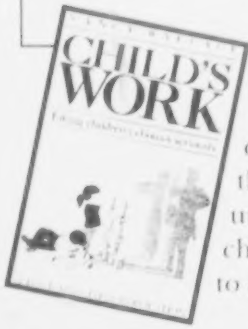

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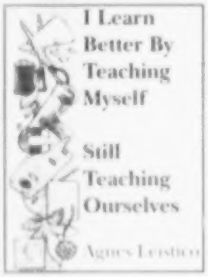

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Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1999 Directory was published in GWS #126.

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Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used: if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

AK — Cecily STERN & Mark SOGGE (Caitlin/84) PO Box 696, Haines 99827 **(H)**

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — John & Catherine REYES (Elizabeth/81, Anastasia/83, Nathan/85, Sean Devin/88) PO Box 168, Dunnigan 95937

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Dean & Kimberlee DAVISON (Michael/88, Rachel/90, Joseph/93) 24059 Via Candela, Valencia 91355

FL — Robin & Vic NORELL (Alyxandra/90, Trevor/93) 7105 Caloosa Ct, Orlando 32819

GA — Alex & Kathie PARKS (Robert/82) 4677 Karls Gate Dr, Marietta 30068-2025

IN — Mary Kay REHARD & Patrick NUGENT (Emma/91, Eliza/95) 444 S 16 St, Richmond 47374-6411 **(H)**

LA — Jerry & Susan DAHLEM (Zach/78, Jessica/80, Nathan/81, Hannah/88, Rachel/92, Ben/96) 899 Blackwell Creek Rd, Many 71449

ME — Jim BERGIN & Judy GARVEY (Matthew/77, Daniel/80) RR1 Box 3215, Blue Hill 04614 (change) **(H)**

MA — Kimberly & Nathanael SCHEDBACH (Lucas/95) 184 Petty Plain Rd, Greenfield 01301 **(H)** ••• Deborah Day SMITH (Richard/87, Leila/89) 67 High St, Andover 01810 **(H)**

MI — Chris & Tom KOSLA (Tony/85, Marty/87, Rachel/91) 1195 Judd Rd, Saline 48176 ••• Carlos & Janet HINTON (Alejandro/92, Antonio/94) 110 E Haley St, Midland 48640-5520 **(H)** ••• Kathy & Dan JOYCE (Jeff/84, Scott/87, Tara/92) 508 Woodland Dr, Buchanan 49107 **(H)** ••• Kay & John KELLY (Clover Jo/91, Conor/93) 4291 40th, Sears 49679 **(H)** ••• Roger & Carla BLOOM (Geoffrey/88) 6983 Huellmantel Lake Rd, Traverse City 49684-9067 (change) **(H)** ••• Celeste & Walter BAZINAU (Alyssa/93, Kiana/96) Sault Home Education Assoc, 1102 Ashmun, Sault Ste Marie 49783 **(H)**

NV — Dave & Debbie COTTS (Aaron/92, Jordan/94, Brennan/97) 741 B Orchard Dr, Fallon 89406 **(H)**

NY — Joanna ANDREESON (Trevor/81, Lynette/96) 3364 Holland Av, Bronx 10467-6221 ••• Sharon FITZGERALD & Richard CHERRY (Ada/85, Irene/87, Garnet/90, Jasper/94, Emrys/97) 77 Demarest Mill Rd, W Nyack 10964 (change) **(H)** ••• Janine KAM & Raj LAL (Zann/90, Zubin/93, Navroz/95) 39-64 45 St, Sunnyside 11104 (change) ••• Lisa & Yitzhak YAKOBI (Rafael/89, Maya/92, Talia/95) 460 W Main St, Huntington 11743 (change) **(H)** ••• Mary O'KEEFFE & Ross MILLER (Alison/86, Catherine/90) 2255 Algonquin Rd, Niskayuna 12309 ••• Michael SKLAROFF & Gail BUCHMAN (Amelia/91, Jonah/95) Woodstock Home Educators Network, 12 Cantines Island, Saugerties 12477 ••• Jennifer & Wolfgang STOCKMEIER (Otto/89, Friedolin/95) 4 Willard Pl, Hudson 12534 **(H)** ••• Bill & Marcia WEINERT (John/85, Margaret/87, Clara/89) 1185 Woodhull Rd, Webster 14580

NC — Ashley & Kathleen JACKSON (Daniel/91, Forrest/94) 2313 Prince St, Durham 27707 **(H)**

OR — John & Jordawn WAMBEKE (Frazer/86, Liberty/88, Spencer/90) 76452 Homestead Ln, Hermiston 97838 **(H)**

PA — Laura & Steven ALEXANDER (Erin/92, Ava/95) 43 Lake Av, Montrose 18801 ••• Terian & Larry CHERTOK (Marley/96, Cole/98) 2165 W Chester Rd, Coatesville 19320

TX — Liesa & Carl BLOND (Lila/85, Julia/92, Mireille/94, Olivia/97) 221 Geneseo Rd, San Antonio 78209 **(H)**

VT — Meghan & Patrick KEITH-HYNES (Bronwyn/92, Aidan/93) 938 Four Mile Wood Rd, Randolph 05060 **(H)**

WV — Dan & Daya SOLOMON (Deva/84, M'eera/87, Matanya/96) 118 Meadowlane Av, Fairmont 26554 **(H)**

Canada:

ON — Berta & Brian GAULKE (Charles/82) Nat'l Capital Region Home Based Learning Network, 136 Aylmer Av, Ottawa K1S 2Y2 **(H)** ••• Karen McKEE (Joe/83) Apt 11, 865 Bronson Av, Ottawa K1S 4G6

QC — Rafaelle BRIEUC (Eleonore/94) 3969 Clark, Montréal H2W 1W8 (change) **(H)**

Other Locations — Danna BARE & Reid HANNULA (Ezekiel/95, Sophie/98) Humboldtstr. 18, 69120 Heidelberg Germany **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #126:

IL — Homeschooling Families of Illinois, 630-548-4349 (Naperville)

MI — Sault Home Education Assoc, 1102 Ashmun, Sault Ste Marie 49783

NY — Woodstock Home Educators Network, 12 Cantines Island, Saugerties 12477, 914-247-0319

Canada — Nat'l Capital Region Home Based Learning Network, 136 Aylmer Av, Ottawa K1S 2Y2, www.flora.org/hbln

Address Changes:

WA — Seattle Homeschool Grp (new phone and email:) 425-402-9048, shgnewsletter@hotmail.com

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. To be listed, send name, age, address and 1-3 words on interests. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself.

WONG, 2409 W Hall Av, Santa Ana CA 92704-5516: Eric (12) cartooning, computers; Lisa (9) writing, pen-pals ••• Autumn BRIGGS (10) RR 2 Box 5370, Lubec ME 04652: reading, biking, writing ••• Meriwether McCLOREY (12) 2535 Pumphouse Rd, Somerset KY 42503: animals, music, sports ••• Alice McBRIDE (7) 224 Bay St, Taunton MA 02780: swimming, reading, animals ••• Tor LATTIMORE (10) 10 Schomburgk St, Yarralumla, Canberra 2600, Australia: computer programming, reading, water sports ••• MAYORGA, 9187 Blue Flag St, Corona CA 91719: Paul (12) bowling, Scouting, science; Ben (14) piano, rollerblading, writing ••• Sunny YARBOROUGH (12) 2337 Greenway Av, Charlotte NC 28204: dancing, reading, babysitting

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1999 Directory (GWS #126)? Yes ___ No ___

Or in the additions in this issue? Yes ___ No ___

Send to GWS, 2380 Mass. Ave., Suite 104, Cambridge MA 02140

Complete 1999 Lists of Resources

Once a year we print our complete lists of helpful teachers, lawyers, professors, psychologists, school districts, resource people, and grown homeschoolers. As with our Directory of Families, we print additions and changes to these lists throughout the year, so please continue to send them in. If you're sending us a change of address for a subscription, please let us know if you're on one of these lists so we can change it here, too. We're always interested to know whether people appreciate having this information available, so do let us know whether these lists are being used.

Certified Teachers

AK - Andy & Deb BYDLON, General Delivery, Big Lake AK 99652; 907-892-9012 (early childhood elem., special ed.)

AZ - Kathleen M. KNEZ, Western Navajo Reservation, PO Box 889, Tuba City 86045, Special Ed

CA, South (zips to 94000) - Tutu ANDERSON, 6949 Fisk Av, San Diego 92122; 619-453-1086 ••• Karen BISHOP, N County Pl, 2204 El Camino Real, Suite 312, Oceanside 92054 ••• John BOSTON, 9942 Canyon Country Ln, Escondido 92026 ••• Michelle BUSH, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042; 818-951-7744 ••• Sandy DOERFEL, PO Box 301331, Escondido 92030 ••• Sarah LESLIE, 1846 N Edgemont #6, Los Angeles 90027; 213-662-5571

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) - Margaret ARIGHI, 6015 Mauritania Av, Oakland 94605; 415-653-5098 ••• Karen CANTO, 21023 Lynn Ln, Sonora 95370 ••• Marilyn DeVORE, 4273 Forbestown Rd, Oroville 95966 ••• Carol CRESTETTO, 29 Taft Ct, Novato 94947 ••• Jasmin GERER, 414 Emeline Av, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-423-8311 ••• Roy SHIMP, 2164 E Bellevue Rd, Merced 95340 ••• Cheryl STEVENS, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette 94549 (K-12, special ed) ••• Scott YOUNG, Charlotte's Web, 1207-F Bridgeway, Sausalito CA 94965; 415-332-2244

CO - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM) ••• Sandra GUENTHER, 2923 Sunset Dr, Golden 80401; English, Spanish, French

CT - Geoffrey SMITH, 365 Bellevue Rd, New Haven 06511; 203-787-5659; Eng, math, 7-12, admin

FL - Charlotte THIEN, 12201 Old Kings Rd, Jacksonville 32219; 904-768-0472 ••• Roger TRUNK, Rt 1 Box 110, Satsuma 32189; 904-649-4479

HI - Debbie KUKAHIKO, FAMILY ACADEMY, 72-3960 Hawaii Belt Rd, Kailua-Kuna 96740

IL - Suzanne BALDWIN, 1452 Andover Dr, Aurora 60504; 708-851-0538 (K-12 music)

IA - Richard & Sharon CARGIN, 25 6th Av NE, LeMars 51031 ••• Rita EBELING, 324 Crescent Ln, Ft Madison 52627

IN - Marie DUSING, FAMILY ACADEMY, Rt 1 Box 509, Poland 47868; 812-986-2884

ME - Sally Embert, 129 Smutty Ln, Saco 04072; 207-286-1602 (experienced evaluator and curriculum developer) ••• Kathi KEARNEY, Box 69, New Sharon 04955; ME & VT K-12 ••• LouAnna PERKINS, Pierce Pond, RR-1 Box 22-C, Penobscot, ME 04476 (K-8) ••• Kristie SIMKO, PO Box 430, Mt Desert ME 04660 (elem.)

MA - Linda C. BUTLER, 15 Eastman Rd, Somerville 02143; 617-628-5802 (early childhood ed, special ed, mental health counselor) ••• George FOURNIER, RFD 2 Box 101, Brimfield 01010 (French) ••• Adele GARLICK, 96 Coolidge Cir, Northborough 01532 ••• George HECHT, 4 High Ledge Av, Wellesley 02181; 617-235-4246 ••• Thomas MAHER, 30 Park St, Wakefield 01880; 617-245-7634 ••• Mary Jo MOORE, 282 Linden St, Berlin 01503; 978-838-2789 (K-12, adult ed) ••• Faith Jones OZAN, 9 Tilehurst Ln, Marblehead 01945 ••• Mario PAGNONI, 76 Emsley Ter, Methuen 01844 ••• Lisa RUBIN, 42 Adella Av, W Newton 02463; 617-630-9773 (K-8, special ed, school psychol, occupational therapist) ••• Heather SCZUROSKI, 30 Mayfield St, Seekonk 02771; 508-761-8382 (K-3) ••• Denise STANLEY, 3 Alhort Dr., Apt 3, Woburn 01801; 617-932-9281 ••• Sharon TERRY, 23 Mountain St, Sharon 02067; 617-784-8006 ••• Marilyn ZUCKERMAN, 153 Medford St, Arlington 02474; 781-643-8483 ••• Linda ZUERN, Box 619, 5 Depot Rd, Cataumet 02534

MI - Kathy DONAHUE, Box 80-B S Superior Rd, Atlantic Mine 49905; K-12 ••• Bonnie MIESEL, 1111 Cricklewood SW, Wyoming 49509 ••• Dinah MORRISON, 76 Latta St, Battle Creek 49015; 7-12 ••• Muriel PALKO, 321 N William, Ludington 49431; K-12

MN - Jeanne BOURQUIN, 1568 McMaham Blvd, Ely 55731 ••• Linda WINSOR, 1927 James Ave, St Paul 55105

NH - Sally EMBER, 284 Water St, Keene 03431 (multicultural education) ••• Tracey A. Hanley, 10 Louisburg Cir, Exeter 03833; 603-772-0322 (porfolio assessment; English; Math)

NJ - Sandy MADKIFF, MINOTOLA ACTIVITY CTR, 207 Coan Av, Minotola 08341; 609-697-1643; K-12 Eng

NM - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM)

NY - Lyman BARRY, 9297 Shaw Rd, Nunda 14517; 716-468-2650; science ••• Diane CHODAN, RD 1 Box 462, Rome 13440 ••• Cheryl COONEY, 225 Rector Pl, 9R, NY NY 10280 (NY, NJ, MA) ••• Lucretia GABRIEL, 12 Fairway Ct, Albany 12208; science ••• John Taylor GATTO, 235 W 76 St, New York NY 10023 ••• Joyce HOUCK, RR 1 Box 148A, Brant Lake 12815; 518-494-2072; elem. ••• Kathi KEARNEY, 1230 Amsterdam Av #604, New York 10027 ••• Martin MILLER, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen 14891; math, sci, accounting ••• Jo MOBERLY, 149 S Main St, Naples 14512 ••• Natalie TATZ, 3320 Bainbridge Av, Bronx NY 10467; 212-654-7918 (elem)

OH - Linda CAMPBELL, 614-470-0572 ••• Elizabeth LOWER, 4875 Potomac Dr, Fairfield 45014 (Montessori) ••• Louann Rebbin-Shaw, 4412 Osborn Rd, Medway 45341; 513-873-8124

OR - Ann LAHRSON, 9025 SW 50th, Portland 97219; 503-244-9677 ••• Marilyn LOWE, 503-362-1203 (Spanish K-12, English 7-12) ••• Mary MAYFIELD, 24874 W Brush Creek Rd, Sweet Home 97386; 503-367-2474; 5-12 ••• Marcia SPANI, ALOHA KIDS ACADEMY, 4640 SW 182, Aloha 97007; 503-642-4094; K-8

PA - Diana BASEMAN, RD 3 Box 256 B, Tarentum 15084 ••• Debby BELL, 6 Royal Rd, Palmyra 17078; language ••• Kathy HOLLEGER, 3106 Swede Rd, Norristown 19401 ••• Rick KEPHART, 1 High St, Malvern 19355 (elem)

TX - Linda JONES, 3301 Hemlock, Temple 76504; elem

VA- Scott CHRISTIAN, Rt 5 Box 358, Martinsville 24112; 703-632-3780 ••• Mary FREED, 1825 W Grace St, Richmond VA 23220 (Montessori) ••• Suzanne STALLINGS, 301 Macon St, Lynchburg 24501-3221; 804-528-4585

VT - Jerry FRAIN, RR 1 Box 31, Walden 05873; 802-563-9947

WA - Mary COLES, 9255 36th SW, Seattle WA 98126 (reading & study skills) ••• FAMILY ACADEMY (teachers all over WA state), 146 SW 153 Box 290, Seattle 98166; 206-246-9227 ••• Karen FOGLE, 14241 NE Wdnvl Duvall #243, Woodinville 98072; 206-481-2228 ••• Julie & David LOYD, General Delivery, Waldron 98297; (Julie: elem, Spanish, math; David: elem, high school, English, Spanish, Social Studies) ••• Tara SENNETT, 15506 19th Av, Tacoma 33445 ••• Denis WICHAR, Cascade Jr High School, 13900 NE 18th St, Vancouver 98684-7299; 256-6052

WV - Linda Campbell, PO Box 4152, Star City WV 26504; 304-983-1200

WI - Cheryl & Bruce BISHOP, 5148 Bluff Ct, Sturgeon Bay 54235; elem. ••• Alison McKEE, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison 53705; elem, vis. impair

CANADA - Leslie AYRE-JASCHKE, 10409-101 St, Peace River AB T8S 1K7

ELSEWHERE- James A. PETRAIT, St. Joseph High School, Plot 3, Rt 2, Frederiksted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands 00840; school 809-772-0455; home 809-778-5761

Lawyers

CT - Frank Cochran, 51 Elm St, PO Box 1898, New Haven 06508-1898; 203-865-7380 ••• George J. Duhaime, 263 Randall Rd, Lebanon 06249; 860-889-9775

FL - Charles Baron, 167th and NE 6th, NO. 815, N. Miami Beach 33160; 305-770-1410 ••• James R. Wells, 3837 Quail Ridge Dr, Boynton Beach 33436; 407-734-5068

HI - Tom DiGrazia, DiGrazia Law Office, PO Box 1780, Kailua 96734

ID - Lyle Eliasen, 202 Idaho St, American Falls 83211; 208-226-5138 ••• Michael Cressler, 414 S Jefferson, Moscow 83843; 208-883-1505

IA - Craig Hastings, 315 6th St, Ames 50010; 515-232-2501

KS - Austin Kent Vincent, 2222 Pennsylvania Av, Topeka 66605; 913-234-0022

MD - Ray Fidler, 805 Tred Avon Rd, Baltimore 21212; 410-296-6495 ••• Paul Kimberger, 3905 Bexley Pl, Marlow Hghts 20746; 301-899-6933 ••• Dale R. Reid, 7091 Brangles Rd, Marriottsville 21104

MA - Eugene Burkart, 267 Moody St, Waltham 02154; 617-899-5337 ••• Susan Ostberg, 41 Warren Av, Harvard 01451; 508-456-8515

MI - Penelope Kozminski, 6650 Tanglewood SE, Grand Rapids 49546-7256; 616-942-4638 ••• Norm Perry, 8976 US 31, PO Box 241, Berrien Spgs 49103; 616-471-2848

NY - Seth Rockmuller, 29 Kinderhook St, Chatham 12037; 518-392-4277

OH - David A. Haffey, 3055 Rodenbeck Dr, Dayton 45432-2662 ••• James Peters, 107 W. Court St, Woodsfield 43793; 614-472-1681

OR - Kim Gordon, 6501 SW Macadam Av, Portland 97201; 503-452-9595

PA - Mark Semisch, 56 Warden Rd, Doylestown 18901

VA – Nancy LeSourd & George Grange II, 8280 Greensboro Dr, 7th Fl, McLean VA 22102

WI - Jack Umpleby, N96W18221 County Line Rd, Menomeonee Falls 53051-1300

WY - Gerald Mason, PO Box 785, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2134 ••• William H. Twichell, PO Box 1219, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2414

Professors

The following people are willing to help homeschooling families in developing curriculum, evaluating progress, or in other ways.

Larry Arnoldsen, Box 10 McKay Bldg, Brigham Young U, Provo UT 84602

Graham Ashworth, 423 Fox Chapel Rd, Pittsburgh PA 15238; 412-963-8800

Robert A. Carlson, College of Ed, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada S7N OWO

Sandy Doerfel, PO Box 301331, Escondido CA 92030

Juanita Haddad, Consultant in Free Range Learning and Deschooling, RR 7, Duncan BC V9L 4W4, Canada

Robert E. Kay, MD, PO Box C, Paoli PA 19301; 215-359-7885

J. Gary Knowles, Program in Educ Studies, School of Ed, U of MI, Ann Arbor MI 48109-1259

Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester MA 01524; 617-892-8012; certified school psychologist & social worker

Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891

Michael J. Murphy, Assoc. Prof., U. of Saskatchewan, College of Education, Saskatoon, Sask., Canada S7N 0W0

Robert Newman, Assoc Prof Emeritus, Teacher Education, Syracuse U, 137 Hughes Pl, Syracuse NY 13210

Seymour Papert, email papert@media.mit.edu

Sam B. Peavey, Ed.D., 2307 Tyler Ln, Louisville KY 40205; 502-459-2058

Edward Pino, 189 Antelope Tr, Parker CO 80134

Richard Prystowsky, Professor of English and Humanities, Irvine Valley College, 5500 Irvine Ctr Dr, Irvine CA 92720

Brian D. Ray, Nat'l Home Education Research Inst, PO Box 13939, Salem OR 97309; 503-364-1490

Mitchel Resnick, MIT Media Lab, 20 Ames St, Cambridge MA 02139; email mres@media.mit.edu

Jack Robertson, 532 Laguardia Pl #398, New York NY 10012-1428

Gary L. Stevens, University of San Francisco, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549

Seymour Treiger, Ed.D., RR 3 Yellow Pt Rd, Ladysmith, BC V0R 2E0, Canada

Chester S. Williams, ETSU, Box 5518, Texarkana TX 75501; 214-838-5458

Psychologists & Psychotherapists

CA - Michelle Bush, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042 ••• Mary Ann Hutchison, 3409 Greenwood Av, Los Angeles 90066; 310-281-7711 ••• Hal Jindich, 191 E El Camino #307, Mountain 94040; 415-969-9981

FL - Dr. Kimberly Kiddoo, 2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd, Coral Gables 33134; 305-442-8500

IL — Rose Mattox, LCPC, American Whole Health Inc., 990 W Fullerton Av Suite 300, Chicago 60130; 773-296-6700

MD - Michael Abrahams, 18 Executive Park Ct, Germantown 20874; 301-428-3557

MA - Neal Katz, 3 Central Ave, Newton 02160-1706; 617-332-7262 ••• Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester 01524 (certified school psychologist and social worker) ••• Dr. Susan Ott, 110 N Main, Petersham 01366; 508-939-2161,e xt. 2205 ••• Lise D. Rubin, 25 Oakland Rd, Sharon 02067; 781-784-5718 (certified school psychologist, certified K-8, Special ed, occupational therapist) ••• Paul Shafiroff, Ed.D., Director of Guidance, Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257 ••• Dr. Paul Daniel Shea, 1450 Beacon St, Suite 801, Brookline 02146; 617-277-4214

NY - Emily Shapiro, 350 Central Park West, Suite 1F, New York NY 10025; 212-866-5957 (psychotherapy, counseling)

OH - Richard George, 1201 30th St NW, Canton 44709

PA - Dr. Bob Conroy, 1724 Smoky Corners Rd, Williamsport 17701

TX - Steven Gutstein, PhD, One West Loop, Suite #215, Houston 77027; 713-621-7496

WA — Molly Davis, MSW, LCSW, 6320-192 Street SE, Snohomish 98296; 360-668-1496 (willing to work over the telephone) ••• Holy Family Institute, 43 Frontier Rd, Appleton WA 98602 (counselors)

CANADA - Jan Hunt, 132 Bullock Creek Rd., Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2L3

School Districts

The following is a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with homeschoolers, and who are willing to be listed in GWS as doing so. There are many more cooperative districts around the country than there are districts on this list, and we have printed several stories in back issues of GWS about cooperation between schools and homeschoolers. If you are interested in seeing this material, place an order and ask us to send you back issues with material on this topic. Back issues are $3 each plus $3 per order for subscribers, $6 each for nonsubscribers.

Do bear in mind that not all states require homeschooling families to work with local school districts; in fact, many do not. Nonetheless, a cooperative school district may give homeschooling families access to events or materials even if they are not legally required to approve of or evaluate those families.

We only list school districts under the following conditions: (1) The family has to be not just satisfied but pleased with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. (2) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

CA - Butte County Office of Education, 2120 B Robinson, Oroville CA 95965, James H. Scott, Principal, Home School Program

Lodi Unified School District, 835 W Lockford St, Lodi 95240; 209-369-7411; Don Shalvey, Asst. Supt. - Instruction K-12

Loma Prieta School District, 23800 Summit Rd, Los Gatos 95030, 408-353-2389; Dr. Kenneth Simpkins, Superintendent; Dr. Ruth Bothne, Independent Home Study Program Director

Marysville Joint Unified, 1919 B St, Marysville 95901

Monterey County Office of Education, 901 Blanco Circle, PO Box 80851, Salinas 93912; Bill LaPlante, Director of Alternative Programs

Mt Shasta Union School District, 601 E Alma St, Mt Shasta 96067; 916-926-3846; Carolyn Briody, Home School Coordinator

Santa Cruz City Schools, Alternative Family Education, 536 Palm St, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-429-3806; Attn: Terry Jones

FL - Student Services, Putnam Cty Schools, 200 S 7th, Palatka FL 32177; 904-329-0538; contact John Milton, asst. Director

IL - Madison Junior High, Southern River Oak Dr, Naperville 60565; Mr. Vergo, Principal

Naperville Central High School, 44 W Aurora Av, Naperville 60540; Mr. Paulsen, Principal

(note: these are individual schools, not school districts.)

MA - Cambridge Public Schools, 159 Thorndike St, Cambridge 02141; 617-498-9233

Chatham Public Schools, Chatham MA 02633, Supt. Vida R. Gavin

Lowell School District, 89 Appleton, Lowell 01852; 454-5431; James McMahon, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum Development

Rockland Public Schools, Rockland 02370, Supt. Ronald P. Gerhart

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257; Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff; Thomas A. Consolati, Supt.

PA - Radnor Township School District, Administration Building, 135 S. Wayne Av, Wayne 19087; Dr. John A. DeFlaminis, Supt.

Resource People

The people listed below have experience with the following subjects and are willing to correspond with others who are interested. In many cases these subjects have been discussed in back issues of GWS, so if you are seeking information you can ask us to select the relevant issues for you. (Back issues are $3 each plus $3 per order for subscribers, $6 for nonsubscribers).

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SMP Company, Box 1563, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1563

Adoption: Maureen Carey, 3 Fayette Park, Cambridge MA 02139 (adoptive nursing, interracial adoption) ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Marty Gylleck, 34356 State Rt 23, Genoa IL 60135 (interracial adoption) ••• Lenne Musarra, 6729 Sherri St, Juneau AK 99801-9443 ••• Derrick Simpson, 1535 W 114 Pl, Chicago IL 60643; 773-239-1725 (foreign adoption) ••• Reed & Chris Sims, RD 2 Box 34, Jericho VT 05465; 802-899-4507 (interracial adoption) ••• Jenny Wright, Quaker City, H.C. 60, Box 50, Charlestown NH 03603; 603-543-0910

Autism: Cindy Gaddis, 928 Turnberry Dr, Richmond KY 40475; 606-624-3571 ••• Henry Lappen, 120 Pulpit Hill Rd #31, Amherst MA 01002; 413-549-3722 (Asperger's Syndrome) ••• Wendy Renish, W1562 Spencer Rd, Loyal WI 54446 ••• Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51st St, Indianapolis IN 46205

Blindness: Donald & Kathy Klemp (son/75) N647[illegible] Kroghville Rd, Waterloo WI 53594 ••• Ruth Matilsky, 109 S 4th Av, Highland Park NJ 08904 ••• Alison McKee, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison WI 53705

Computers: Jack Loranger, MPO 17-R Krogstad Rd, Washougal WA 98671; 206-837-3760; "Electronic Educator" BBS #837-3299 ••• Mario Pagnoni, 76 Emsley Terr, Methuen MA 01844 ••• Theo Sherman, 2555 Collins Av #2303, Miami Beach FL 33140; 305-538-7162

Custody Disputes: Debbie Driscoll, 14503 SE 114th Pl, Renton WA 98059 (also single parents & gay & lesbian families) ••• Char Love, PO Box 2035, Guerneville CA 95446-2035. (We maintain a list of others with experience in this area who prefer not to list themselves publicly, and we will forward stamped letters to these people if asked.)

Down Syndrome: Elaine Bechtold, 10827 Rosendale Av N, Rt 1 Box 233, Loretto MN 55357-9793; 612-498-7553 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Heidi Jarvis, N8379 Center Rd, Gleason WI 54435; 715-873-4050 ••• Beth Stanley, Northside Villa apt. B-5, 2711 Allen Rd, Tallahasseeeeee FL 32312; 850-386-3711

Gifted Children: Isabelle Nidever, 5917 Oak Av, Suite 176, Temple City CA 91780-2404; 818-287-8595

Ham Radio: Sheryl Schuff, 8156 Lieber Rd, Indianapolis IN 46260; 317-259-4778

Learning Disabilities: ••• Pose M.R. Boggs, 6223 Geronimo Cir, Anchorage AK 99504—Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Leslie McColgin, RR 1 Box 146, Cunningham KY 42035 (speech & language pathologist) ••• Chris Sims, RD 2 Box 34, Jericho VT 05465; 802-899-4507 ••• Cheryl & Gary Stevens, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549 (Special Ed.; Chemical Sensitivity)

Mental Illness: Jennifer Rozens, 33411 Jefferson Av, St Clair Shores MI 48082

Montessori: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601 ••• Elizabeth Lower, 4875 Potomac Dr, Fairfield OH 45015

Physical Handicaps: Janna Books, Box 309-B, Route 2, Santa Fe NM 87505 ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Karen Franklin, 3939 Winfield Rd, Boynton Bch FL 33436 (Jessica/80 C.P.) ••• Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891 ••• Lenne Musarra (see under Adoption) ••• Saunny Scott, 1901 Barker St, Lawrence KS 66044 ••• Derrick Simpson (see under adoption)

Single Parents: Debbie Driscoll (see under Custody Disputes) ••• Janet Hoffman, PO Box 288, Hamburg PA 19526-0288 ••• Diane McNeil, 3131 Cty EE, Baileys Harbor WI 54202 ••• Laura Pritchard, 25607 98th Pl So, Apt K-102, Kent WA 98031 ••• Lisa Spector, 203-677-2852 ••• Sally Sherman, 2555 Collins Av #2303, Miami Beach FL 33140; 305-538-7162 ••• Derrick Simpson (see under adoption ••• Karen Turner, PO Box 622, Redway CA 95560-0622 ••• Beth White, PO Box 3734, Eugene OR 97403; 541-935-5457 ••• Christine Willard, 2090 Pine Ave, Los Osos CA 93402

Traveling Families: Lois & Jim Blumenthal, 1132 Beechwood Dr, Hagerstown MD 21742-3007 ••• Louis & Jennifer Gordon (Katie/81, Patty/84) 10355 Grand Av, Bloomington MN 55420-5228 ••• Arlene Haight (Becky/68, Matt/73) 4150 So US #1, RD 2, Palm Bay FL 32905

Twins: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601

Grown Homeschoolers

These former homeschoolers are now at college or involved in work, apprenticeships, or travel. In most cases, we list their parents' address because the homeschoolers' own addresses change often. In parentheses, we include a very brief description of what the person is doing or has done, and, where applicable, we have also listed the GWS issue in which a more complete description of the person's experience was published. Get in touch with these folks if you're interested in attending their college or exploring their field or if you're just interested in the perspective of a grown homeschooler.

Aiazel Acheson, 2121 S Alaska, Tacoma WA 98405; 206-272-8124 (U. of Puget Sound; computer research and development)

Eleadan Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (teaching gymnastics; GWS #76)

Tia Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (School of Visual Concepts, Seattle)

Elye Alexander, RR 1 Box 795, Craftsbury Common VT 05827 (Harvard University)

Mylie Airich, PO Box 869, Greenville CA 95947; 916-284-6929 (restaurant work, real estate)

Rebecca Auerbach, 5330 Redwood Rd, Napa CA 94558; email: mail2ra@hotmail.com (Sonoma State University, writing; GWS #123)

Ben Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (fiddler, EMT, expedition guide; GWS #86, #93)

Britt Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (published writer & poet, pilot, railroad engineer, runs piano studio; GWS #56, #60, #93)

Dan Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (cellist at Interlochen Arts Academy, Oberlin Conservatory; directs farm program; GWS #79, #84, #93)

Jonah Barker 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (directs farm program, works with solar-powered technology, motorcycles)

Maggie Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (dogsledder, Search & Rescue, certified massage therapist, expedition guide; GWS #60, #81, #88, #91)

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, 314 Bryn Mawr Av, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; 610-527-4982 (University of Pennsylvania; library work, legal publishing, writing; GWS #97, #118)

Emily Bergson-Shilcock, 314 Bryn Mawr Av, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; 610-527-4982 (Beaver College; runs The Destination of Independence, which sells products to people with disabilities; GWS #115, #118)

Stephanie Bromfield, 1329 Blue Mtn Dr, Danielsville PA 18038; 215-767-3554 (community college; retail work)

Rebecca Cauthen, 260 Donald Lamb Rd, Moreland GA 30259 (Shorter College; GWS #97)

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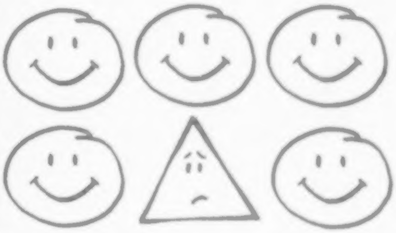

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Amber Clifford, 475 NE 200, Knob Noster MO 65336 (Central MO State U; GWS #97)

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Tamara Cohen, 160 Cornerstone Ln, Arroyo Grande CA 93420 (foreign exchange student; Agnes Scott College)

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Mike Dodd, 1648 Joe Hinton Rd, Knoxville TN 37931 (Boston University, University of Tennessee; GWS #71)

Leonie Edwards, PO Box 75, Harrisburg OR 97446 (dentistry; GWS #110)

Michelle Edwards, PO Box 392, Harrisburg OR 97446 (runs photography studio; GWS #110)

Andrew Endsley, 4546 Willow Crest Dr, Toluca Lake CA 91602 (film directing; GWS #77, #97)

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Gwyneth Jackson, 1000 Devil's Dip, Tallahassee FL 32308; 904-878-2793 (Wellesley College)

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Peter Kaseman, 2545 Koshkonong Rd, Stoughton WI 53589 (carpenter, juggler – holds Guiness World Record)

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Sarah Smith, 1712 Cliff Dr, Columbia MO 65201; 573-817-2243 (U of Missouri; work at therapeutic riding center)

Seth Smith, 1712 Cliff Dr, Columbia MO 65201 573-817-2243 (NE Missouri State U, Central Methodist College; trail construction for U.S. Forest Service)

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Jessica Spicer, RR 1 Box 15, Avoca WI 53506; 608-562-3969 (intern at Cato Institute in Washington DC; GWS #95)

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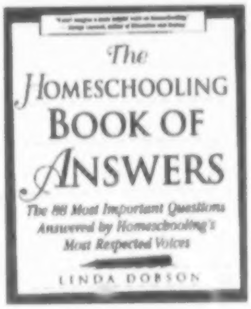
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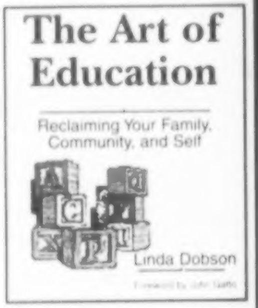

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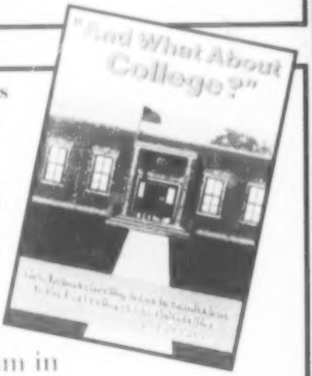

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MAY/JUNE '99

GWS

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BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

In Tracy Kidder's book *Among Schoolchildren*, there's a scene in which the teacher talks with a student about his failure to pay attention. "You don't like it when I call on you in math," Mrs. Zajac observes, and Jimmy agrees that he doesn't. She asks him why, and he hesitates and then finally blurts out, "Because it makes me feel stupid."

Exactly. Not knowing the answer when we believe we're supposed to know (and when we'll be penalized for not knowing) does make us feel stupid, not to mention scared, defensive, and ashamed. And – contrary to what a lot of educators seem to believe – these feelings don't facilitate learning, they choke it.

Many of us spent so much time in environments in which not knowing was penalized that we learned to bluff, to fake it, to dodge the question, to nod and pretend to understand – anything to avoid openly admitting ignorance. This lingers well into adulthood. People apologize for not knowing or talk about something as if they know all about it when in fact they don't.

I often find myself wondering what it would be like if people really could openly admit ignorance. One thing that might happen is that people would actually have a chance to *learn* what they didn't know – and learn it truly, solidly, in a way that would stick. Another possible consequence is that people wouldn't have to offer up half-formed ideas because saying *something* was preferable to saying they didn't know. Some time ago it struck me that dinner-party conversation about well-known books and ideas is often more about reviews of the book, or talk-show summaries of the ideas, than it is opinions from people who have actually read the book itself. I decided to try an experiment for myself: I wouldn't comment on books I hadn't read, and I'd try to say "I don't know enough about that to have an opinion" if that was in fact the case.

It's hard to do this, but it does clear the air in an important way, and it does clear the way for more real learning. In the Harvard Project's studies of adolescent girls that came out several years ago, one of the researchers' observations was that as they get older, girls' sentences are increasingly full of the phrase "I don't know." As an expression of distrust in oneself and in a listener's willingness to hear the truth of one's feelings, frequent use of "I don't know" is indeed cause for concern. But viewed from another perspective and in another context, saying "I don't know" is potentially quite courageous. It challenges the idea that ignorance is shameful and offers the radical alternative that it's OK not to know. Such openness acknowledges that it's impossible to know everything, and that, in fact, sometimes humility and respect for the limits of what we *can* know is the wiser course. And sometimes, not knowing simply means not having learned it *yet* – which need not be viewed as a problem.

GWS usually celebrates learning, but in this issue we also celebrate not knowing – both in the Focus section and in the conversation with William Ayers. We explore the value of doubt, of curiosity, and of honesty – all of which actually end up aiding learning! – Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Defeating Compulsory School Age Bill in Montana

Karen Semple (MT) writes:

Homeschoolers in Montana just recently had our rights challenged in a proposed bill that would have extended compulsory attendance from grade 8 or 16 years old to grade 12 or 18 years old, in addition to proposing all sorts of new truancy rules. Many homeschoolers turned out to testify at the hearing of the bill in committee and it ended up being tabled. Interestingly, no education groups or agencies testified in support of this bill; the supporters were truancy officials.

Then, soon afterwards, another bill was heard in committee that would have changed the compulsory school age. This one would have lowered it from age 7 to 6. The opposition testimony was overwhelming, focusing on the many studies that refute the perceived benefits and therefore perceived need for institutionalized schooling of young children. The committee was a dangerous committee politically, since of the 18 members, 7 were teachers. The Office of Public Instruction (Montana State official bureaucracy) and the Montana Education Association (Montana chapter of the NEA) supported the bill. The bill was tabled, 10-8, on the same day – something very rare.

Ironically, this hearing was on the same day as our Legislative Day, where homeschoolers from all over the state converge on the capitol. The rotunda is reserved and banners representing the various support organizations from across the state are hung. In the past, the governor has made a speech in support of home education, but he declined this year and only made a brief appearance. (Politics, I'm sure. He's on his last term.) The speakers of both houses make speeches extolling the virtues of education and educational choice. In the past, the children (last time over 400) gathered on the steps and sang "America" and the Montana State song. This year it was decreed to be a fire safety hazard and not allowed. Many parents make a date to take their representatives to lunch or bake goodies to give them. It is an opportunity for the legislators and senators to see that we are not *only* right-wing, religious fundamentalists as we are so often portrayed in the national media. In the afternoon, the children get to sit in the galleries and watch the legislative process in action.

We had gotten wind of another possible bill that would require mandatory testing for homeschoolers in Montana. (Testing is not mandatory here now; the law states that the homeschooling parent is "solely responsible for the evaluation of the home school instruction.") I learned that those wanting to get a sponsor for a testing bill (a group called the Montana Human Rights Network) had been unable to do so. The legislators they approached said that they "didn't want to take on the homeschoolers." In an article from the newsletter put out by MHRN is this quote referring to those in the state superintendent's office, local school board members, county superintendents and classroom teachers with whom they had discussed this bill: "They also agreed that the home-school lobby is very well organized and that any effort to change the status quo would meet with political defeat in the legislature."

Steve White, chairman of the Montana Coalition of Home Educactors and home educating dad, is the person that deserves a pat on the back for this. The Coalition is a statewide organization made up of support organizations from across Montana, and Steve is the one who monitors the pending legislation and status of bills for us. He is the one that activates our email and phone trees by emailing or faxing information on bills of educational interest that are pertinent to home educators. He also puts together packets of information each month to send to the support groups, keeping us up to date on what is happening statewide and nationally. He lives two hours away from Helena, the capital, yet, he is present continually, lobbying and testifying on behalf of home educators.

State University Admissions News

Karen Semple also writes:

Recently, the Montana Board of Regents passed a ruling change for entry into Montana's University System. Of particular interest to home educators are the following:

1. The requirement of high school graduation may be satisfied by:

a. A High School Equivalency Diploma based on G.E.D. (General Educational Development) examination; or

b. Satisfactory performance on either ACT (American College Testing program) or COMPASS examinations, for students who complete their secondary education through home schooling or at unaccredited secondary school.

c. Standard for "satisfactory performance" on the ACT examination shall be recommended by the admitting institution and approved by the Board of Regents. These scores shall not fall below scores which the U.S. Department of Education has published through the Federal Register as indicative of a student's "ability-to-benefit" from post secondary education.

These are all very positive changes from previous policy.

While Montana has seen a positive change regarding homeschoolers' admission to the state university system, homeschoolers in Georgia have been struggling with what many have perceived as a discriminatory policy towards homeschoolers. A group called the Georgia Coalition for Equity and Diversity in USG Admissions, which was created to represent parents and students from home study programs and non-accredited private schools before the Chancellor and the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, submitted a pro-posal last fall to try to change the existing admissions policy. That policy (in effect since 1997) requires homeschoolers and students from non-accredited private schools to take seven SAT II tests and to have passing scores that the coalition felt were discriminatory (because they were not required of all students). The coalition worked on an alternative proposal, and at our press time it appears that a new policy has been instituted which lowers the number of required tests (cut-off scores had yet to be determined).

Readers interested in much more detailed exchanges regarding these requirements can find information on the website of Georgia's Home Education Information Resource: http://www.heir.org. Their mailing address is PO Box 2111, Rosewell GA 30077; phone 404-681-4347.

Parents Dispute Homeschooling

Colorado homeschooler Cindy Stanley has been keeping people up to date about a homeschooling dispute between two parents in Colorado, through her website <http://www.pcisys.net/~dstanley/shelly.htm>. She has given us permission to excerpt from that story here:

...Shelly and Michael, parents of 12-year-old Christa, had divorced years ago, back when Christa was just a toddler. Both parents had always agreed that homeschooling was a preferable educational option for their daughter. ... Then, late last summer, one of those small communication impasses so common in joint custody arrangements suddenly popped up. Mom and Dad couldn't agree on who was going to pay how much on one of Christa's medical expenses. It became apparent that the only way to solve this impasse was to take the matter to court and let a Magistrate decide for them.

During the pre-hearing paperwork exchange between the lawyers, it was discovered that Michael's child support payments hadn't increased at all since 1990. There's quite a cost difference between raising a 2-year-old versus raising a 12-year-old. In order for the court to take a look at this issue, Shelly had to list all of the expenses involved in raising Christa, which of course, included the costs of homeschooling.

Later on during the ongoing paperwork exchange, Shelly got her first inkling that her ex-husband was no longer in favor of homeschooling. One set of papers from Michael's lawyer stated, "Home schooling by the mother is not appropriate and not in the best interests of the child under the current circumstances. While home schooling might have been beneficial while the child was younger, she has reached a grade level where the mother is no longer adept or qualified to provide proper instruction." Shelly assumes that this sudden change of heart stemmed from the idea that home education expenses might further increase her ex-husband's child support payments.

... The hearing was held in late summer. ... During the proceeding, both the Magistrate and the opposing attorney began an intense line of questioning. Shelly was asked to describe their homeschooling activities, defend her reasons for choosing home education, elaborate on the merits of Christa's past, present and future curricula, justify the results of her child's standardized test results as evidence of an adequate education, and explain in extensive detail just how much and what type of socialization Christa was actually getting. The fact that Christa had been enrolled for 3 years in a private school (aka Umbrella/Satellite/Independent school) that specializes in assisting homeschoolers was also brought up, but ultimately disregarded as being unimportant to the matter at hand.

... By this time, Christa had celebrated her 13th birthday. She was never allowed to speak on her own behalf during either of the hearings. After the first part of the hearing was concluded (the court had run out of time), Shelly – naturally – was quite alarmed about the negative and totally unexpected focus of the hearing. Shortly thereafter, she called the Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC), another organization she had been a member of for 7 years. The staff person at CHEC listened to her tale of legal woes, and in response,

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gave her the name of a local lawyer who might be able to help. On December 15, 1998, the second part of the hearing was held. After all was said and done, the Honorable Marilyn Leonard made her ruling.

Also in early January, Michael's lawyer filed two Petitions with the court. Taken together, the Petitions challenged the Forthwith Order sent to Judge Jackson, by stating that "Shelly was not homeschooling in compliance with the law" because she had not started teaching her daughter the Constitution of the United States at the beginning of 7th grade/junior high, as required by Statute CR 22-1-109. Turns out that CR 22-1-109 is a public school statute, and does NOT apply to homeschoolers. This fact has been pointed out in a follow-up document submitted to the court by Shelly's attorney. In early February, Shelly received a Motion for Contempt of Court which asked that she be held in contempt for not placing Christa in public school back in January. If Magistrate Leonard finds her guilty, she faces possible jail time, a fine, and will be required to pay Michael's attorney's fees and assorted legal costs associated with the filing of this document.

On February 26th, this news was posted:

1) Judge Jackson has ordered that the contempt of court hearing that was to be held on March 1st is to be vacated! This means that there will be NO hearing at all. The contempt citation against Shelly has been DROPPED.

2) The Judge also ordered Magistrate Leonard to RE-HEAR Shelly's case. His decision stated that he wants the new hearing to encompass any and all additional findings, such as witnesses and further testimony.

3) In addition, Judge Jackson felt it was a little too late in the year to require Christa to suddenly switch from homeschool to public school. Especially when all these other things are still up in the air. Therefore, Christa can continue to homeschool. At least for now....

Calendar

April 30-May 1: Wisconsin Parents Association 16th Annual Home Education Conference at the University Center in **Stevens Point, WI**. For info: 608-283-3131 or www.homeschooling-wpa.org

May 27-29: Florida Parent-Educators Association annual convention at the World Center Marriott, **Orlando, FL**. The Colfaxes, Cafi Cohen, many other speakers and vendors; Susannah Sheffer will be speaking and John Holt's Bookstore exhibiting. For info: 407-722-0895; www.fpea.com

June 4-6: Clonlara Home-Based Education Program conference in **Warren, MI**. Pat Farenga will be speaking; John Holt's Bookstore exhibiting. For info: 724-769-4515

Sept. 24-26: Growing Without Schooling conference at Eisner Camp, **Great Barrington, MA.** Talks, workshops and panels for new homeschoolers *and* experienced ones, children's program, camp activities. See back cover, this issue. ◆

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Homeschooling and Adoption

Questioning Family's Choices

A New Hampshire mother writes:

We have a grown daughter and two boys 6 1/2 months apart in age – one adopted and one by birth – who are now 13 and 14 years old. All three are homeschoolers. There are two main areas where homeschooling and adoption interact: first, in the adoption process (getting permission to adopt) and second, in the process we're now in the middle of: homeschooling and parenting an adopted child.

Because our unusual life choices (seasonal farm work, low-tech, low-income living, homeschooling) made us doubtful that an adoption agency would choose us over more conventional families, and because we believe in the birthmother's right to choose an adoptive family, *and* because we're do-it-yourself types, we took the search process into our own hands. We made up and sent out notices to friends in New England, asking them to hang them up at colleges, laundromats, etc. There was a photo of us and our daughter and two sentences about wanting to adopt a baby, and our mailing address. We only got 30 sent out before our first response came in. We got two more responses in the following six months.

So we had been unnecessarily pessimistic about our chances to adopt. We don't know how different agencies would have dealt with us if we hadn't found a baby, but once we had L. in a legal guardianship and his birthmother was happy with us, the homestudy people were very supportive of us being approved and wrote a glowing report. The judge wasn't concerned about homeschooling or the other unconventional aspects of our lives. And we had L. with us from the time he was three days old.

I don't want to make it sound easy. Many things were hard: the losses leading to the decision to adopt (two of our babies had died soon after birth), all the decisions about how we would go about each stage of the process, dealing with lawyers, social workers, and L.'s birthmother. We were making decisions based on unknowables, going further and further out on a limb, or getting closer and closer to our true path, depending on how we looked at it. It wasn't easy, but it was worth it and we're all better for it.

We have an "open adoption." L.'s birthmother has a role similar to that of an aunt and we see her two or three times a year. If she's having problems, there's usually some way we can help. She supports our role as his parents and shares our basic ideas about what's good for him. She's another adult who will listen to him and who wants to spend time with him. The adoption is final and legal and doesn't depend on our good relationship, but we've been able to maintain this.

AND NOW TO the present: parenting and homeschooling an adopted teenager, this one in particular. We're in the middle of this and it isn't simple to judge. There are a lot of ups and downs these days.

For L., as for any adopted child, there is a strong awareness that he could easily have ended up somewhere else. In this case, almost any other family would have been more mainstream. Our lifestyle choices raise questions and issues for him. His expressed opinion is that he'd prefer if we had TV, computer games, and snowmobiles and went hunting and fishing.

This kind of "grass is greener" thinking isn't unique to adopted kids, but it has special significance to them. And since our children by birth didn't and don't criticize our choices so much, L. feels even more the outsider. "M. gets what he wants more than I do, because he wants what you want him to want," he says of his brother.

Whether by inheritance or by considered choice, L. is definitely interested in things from his birth heritage, some of them chosen without his knowing they were part of this. CB radios, truck drivers, hunting, fishing, the list goes on. He is also interested in many things that his life with us offers, but part of defining his identity is seeking the "other" – what we *don't* offer. He sometimes feels acutely that he's missing out and doesn't fit in our family.

This can be disheartening for us, trying to offer him what we believe is best. It's hard to know what we should do: should we try to remedy this and take up going to Demolition Derbies? Should we just be sympathetic and try not to be defensive? Or should we pressure him to come on the bird-watching outing with us, because he'll like it after all? We end up doing some of each.

L. ISN'T ASKING to go to school. Too many of his school friends tell him he's lucky not to go. But he wants to be on his own, outside of the family, experimenting with what he's been missing. He's fearless and undaunted in this pursuit. At age 11 he went to the local school dance, knowing only one kid there and not knowing "how to dance." He had to dance with the school principal, among others (she asked him). He calls up storekeepers, calls 800-numbers giving suggestions to companies, etc.

Before I wrote this last part about his being fearless, I was going to say he had low self-esteem. But it's more complex than that. In his forays into the world outside the family, he shows the appearance of having strong self-esteem. He's polite and cheerful and not at all shy. He takes chances gracefully, asks for what he wants, expects to get it. Within the family, though, he often takes the attitude that he has to fight for his rights, to get his share. There's a fair amount of competition with his brother, lobbying for equal treatment, making deals, trying to get out of jobs or lessons. After years of daily "morning jobs," he'll still occasionally say to me, "What jobs are *you* doing? None! You've got us doing all the work around here!" He's often rude and argumentative. He ends up doing what we ask, but with so little grace that it's hard to appreciate it.

I was like this growing up, and I wasn't adopted. He and I have similar temperaments in this way. Although we may not actually have more than our share of hardships, you'll *hear* about the ones we have!

I think L. would like one thing that school would offer: the chance to see what other people are up to. To watch and learn about a range of people. School isn't the only place for this and probably isn't the best one, but it is one. L. met a girl recently in town and started calling her on the phone and wanting us to drive them to the movies and pick them up after. I was aware how little he knew about her, because he hasn't been able to watch her in action at school, or anywhere else. There is a good side to this, though. I know of cases where a homeschooled kid has a friend who, for one reason or another, is a misfit in school. The homeschool-er is outside all that peer pressure to avoid kids who aren't "cool," and so good friendships are formed that might not exist in a school setting. That's true of L. and one of his friends.

But back to reasons I'd like him to know a wider range of people: he doesn't know how other families compare to ours about many issues. He only knows intimately the half dozen or so families that we know well and the two or three other families that he's gotten to know through his own efforts. I wish he knew, through his observations, that though we're at one end of the spectrum about computers, for example, we are much more middle ground in relation to teenagers dating, etc. When I talk to him about what we want to allow at this age, he says, "You're so old-fashioned. That's not a normal attitude for parents nowadays." He assumes that we are at the extreme end about every issue, though that isn't true. So we are all seeking ways for him to get out in the world more, where he can get more of a picture of the wider community.

He found one way: he got a CB radio. Now our house without electricity has a huge antenna for his "base station," provided by a car battery. He spends time talking to people far away and to a group of local people who like to talk about snowmobiling and deer hunting. He tells them about himself and has found a window on their culture that we live side-by-side with. At first I worried about who he'd be talking to about what, but as I check in about it, I don't see anything alarming. These people are OK, a community of sorts, looking out for each other. They're nice to L., and he's polite and nice to them. His self-chosen handle is "Mad Dog," but they call him "Puppy Dog" or "Happy Dog," more fitting for his personality.

He also goes to his friends' houses

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and plays video games and watches TV. We're finding volunteer working situations for him at the food co-op and the recycling center. We're including another homeschooled teenager in our regular work, and we get together with 4-H teenagers and the people who come to a local Learning Exchange center that in-cludes socializing, lessons, and games with other homeschoolers. These are all recent things, and after a few hard months, L. seems more relaxed and there's generally less conflict.

I know we'll probably have bad spells again. He's just beginning the process of separating himself from us and choosing his own way in the world. This happens to all our children, of course, whether homeschooled or adopted or neither. I do think homeschooling has given him a better foundation to know himself and to really be with his family. Maybe his complaints are actually proof of his security, rather than what they sound like! I'm too much in the middle of it to know.

Too Many Differences?

Chris Sims (VT) writes:

When our family decided to homeschool, nothing much changed for us parents except the questions people asked. Having adopted two children who bear us very little physical resemblance, my husband and I learned very early on to endure stares and, now and then, some strange questions and comments. When the children were babies, we heard things like, "Will she speak with a Korean accent?", "How much did he cost?", "Are they brother and sister?", "Are you babysitting?", and "Are you ever going to tell them that they're adopted?" Then there were the really cute statements like, "Children! Quick! Come here! See how *different* this baby looks? Her eyes are just so *different*. She's not like us at all!" and "Oh! You're adopting! Did you get a white baby or did you have to take an Asian?", and, as I was leaving a restaurant, babe in arms, a complete stranger said, "Don't worry, ma'am, now that you've adopted, you'll be able to relax. [Wink.] Pretty soon you'll have a *real* baby of your *own.*"

While I'm sure most people mean well and are just making conversation, there are times you just have to pick your jaw off the ground and move on! One of the most helpful things offered by the adoption agency was a series of workshops that prepared us ahead of time for the curiosity that might come our way. Hearing some of the comments other families had dealt with gave us a chance to come up with tactful, educational answers ahead of time – answers that could be polite (or sometimes, I admit, a little impolite) while still keeping our children's privacy foremost in mind.

From those early years of questions, it was no stretch at all to deal with the people whose stares during our daytime outings nowadays so often lead to a raised eyebrow and a cheerful, "What, no school today?" Other than the odd mix of questions we get, the fact that we are homeschooling adopted children (who are now 9 and 11) is not an issue for us. The only bump we ever faced was when the doctor who diagnosed our daughter's learning "difference" out-and-out told us that we must not continue to homeschool her. "She's already different because she's adopted," he said, "and different because she's of a race other than that of her parents, and different because she has a learning disability. Homeschooling will only make her more different and she'll never fit into society or develop a healthy self-esteem." The kids' pediatrician said the same thing, as did a number of relatives and friends. By then, however, our eldest had already had a brush with school. There, where she found herself too energetic to sit still but leagues ahead of the other kids academically, the message she learned each day was, "I am different and different is not OK." There, the nail that stuck out got hammered. Not eager to repeat that lesson, we simply thanked the good doctors and others for their concerns and kept on homeschooling. At home, there are no learning disabilities, just unique ways of gathering information. In school, the kids experienced the hurts of racism, but out in the community, we find that differences – in looks, learning styles, interests, abilities, disabilities, diet, philosophy, birthplace, or whatever – either aren't a big deal or they're things to pounce upon as exciting opportunities to learn something new.

Paul Sims adds:

The subject of adoption doesn't come up often. It sometimes comes up when we talk about when Mom and Dad first saw us and said, "That's my baby!" Sometimes kids ask if I'm Chinese or Japanese. Most of the time, I don't think about having been adopted.

Homeschooling comes up a lot. Adults say, "What! No school today?" I don't mind answering them. My friends who go to school don't think homeschooling is that much different. I feel like I'm the same as them. I don't feel like an outsider. Sometimes they say I'm lucky. I suppose I am! I don't have to sit in a chair and stare at a teacher all day long. I have more time to read. I can have recess for the whole day! Also, you learn more in homeschooling.

And Emily Sims adds:

The doctor who said I would feel different is wrong. The most different thing about people is their hobbies. I love horses. It's important to me to have friends who love horses, too. I meet horse lovers through Scouts and 4-H and other places.

Most of my friends go to school. We never talk about adoption, but sometimes they ask if I'm Chinese or Japanese. I don't like it when people ask me that. Usually, I just walk away. When I say I'm Korean, they sometimes say there's no such thing. Most of my schooled friends like school. They don't think I'm weird for homeschooling, but they think the law says everyone must go to school. I guess they think I'm breaking the law! I don't bother to correct them. I'm happy being the way I am.

Caseworkers Evaluate Family

A Vermont mother writes:

Three years ago, we started

looking into adopting a child. It wasn't that I wasn't able to have more children myself, it's just that we wanted to change a life or two. Years ago, we had been foster parents for a little girl and we really loved it. When we began looking into adoption, we had two grown children and two younger ones. But then my son was diagnosed with cancer, and that put everything else on hold. We cared for him for three years, and he died eight months ago.

A few months after that, we began looking into foster care again, with the intent of eventually adopting, if that worked out. We took foster care licensing classes – an eight-week training session – and had two children placed with us at the end. They were two kids, aged 3 and 6 and whose previous foster care situation had not worked out.

I'm homeschooling my own 5-year-old daughter. I homeschooled my son before he was diagnosed with cancer, and I homeschooled my 17-year-old son for a year when he was in eighth grade. So homeschooling was already a part of our life. When the two foster children came to us, we were told that the older one, the boy, did not attend school regularly. He was in danger of having to repeat kindergarten. This is a 6-year-old boy who has no family, and now you're going to make him stay back in school, giving him something else to feel bad about? To me, the most important thing to do was to show him how much we loved him, and then to bring him up to grade level so that if the state forced him to go to school, he would at least not have the stigma of being kept back. Of course, I actually hoped that we would be able to homeschool him, but since I didn't know how things would work out, I wanted to be ready for the possibility that he would go back to school as well.

The assumption on the part of the caseworkers was that I would send him to school. I told our caseworker that I wanted to homeschool, and she said it was out of the question; they just didn't allow it. I said I was sorry but I had read all the information and it just said that homeschooling was "not encouraged." When I later talked with the supervisor, I was told that the children were just in my emergency care, that it was most important to get them settled, and that after a while they would re-evaluate the situation.

Meanwhile, I'm not sending him to school, and I'm keeping records of everything he's accomplished here. Since he's been with us he's learning to read, he can read four-digit numbers, and he knows his states. Even the caseworker was impressed when she came to our home and saw how well he writes now. I keep stressing that this is a child who has been through enough already, and, on top of everything else, he's physically big for his age, so it would be hard for him to stay back in kindergarten. He doesn't need that extra blow to his self-esteem.

We know that these children are free for adoption, and since we went into foster care with the hope of adopting, we feel lucky that the first children placed with us are free for adoption and fit in so well with our family. We see how well they respond to our love, and the little girl calls me "Mama" already. The caseworkers know that we're looking into adoption, but they keep saying it's too soon after my son's death. This is actually the bigger concern they have, even more than the homeschooling. I keep telling them that we definitely feel ready to do this. I'm aware that there's nothing I can do to bring back my child, but this is something I can do to change the lives of others, especially these two children who are in danger of being flunked out of society because they're misfits.

We're told that we haven't been through the grieving process for our son, but what they don't understand is that we were grieving for three years, ever since he was diagnosed. First you fill your shelves with books on miracles, and you hope for a miracle as you find the best surgeon, do everything you can. When you find out the miracle isn't going to happen, you make the best out of the worst situation. My husband and I have a tight marriage, and that makes a difference, because we can grieve together. I understand that people are concerned about our readiness to adopt, but we feel we are ready.

And, as I've said, the homeschooling is an additional issue. The other day, a lady from the state called to check in with us and she said she was concerned about the fact that I was keeping the kids home, because parents need a break. Well, I can take a break if I need to, but I've always loved being involved in my children's education. I ran a preschool for years and I decided to homeschool my kids after watching the kids I taught disintegrate as soon as they went into school. As well, because my husband travels a lot, homeschooling gives us the flexibility to go with him.

The guardian ad litem has come to visit us – I've told her to come, unannounced, any time – and she has called me several times and said, "Thank you for doing so much for these children." Next week, someone from the licensing department is coming out, and I can't wait to show her my school environment and show her all the things we do, like starting seedlings in the spring and selling the plants later on. I'll tell her that we're part of a homeschooling group and we get together to go on field trips, and I'll explain that I'm not anti-public-school, that I have a lot of friends who are teachers, but that homeschooling works for us.

Before we went to press, this writer gave us an update:

The visit with the woman from the licensing department went very well. I could tell that she was very impressed with our home environment and with how the children were doing. She didn't mention homeschooling, which I took as a good sign.

But a couple of weeks later, the state called and told us they would deny the adoption because they still believe it's too soon for us. We're very upset and are going to fight it. ◆

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Challenges & Concerns

We don't usually spend a lot of time criticizing school in GWS's pages. But each of the young people in the essays that follow looks at school from a special perspective not usually heard in discussions of education, and we're devoting this issue's "Challenges & Concerns" to their voices.

Considering Differences

Andrew Huckins (MA) writes:

I know GWS talks a lot about the relationships between schoolers and homeschoolers. Here are a couple of things that I have been noticing recently.

All my life I have been around school kids. Now that I'm 14, I am deeply involved in soccer. I take a couple of classes at the school, and I live in a neighborhood highly populated with schoolers. Although this means that I have a lot of friends who go to school, we have more differences than likenesses. Sometimes it is good to not have the same opinion as your friends, but it gets hard when you are constantly disagreeing. I think that if I ever find a really and truly best friend then it will turn out to be a home-schooler. Not because a homeschool-er would have my opinion but because when I did disagree they wouldn't say that I was wrong, they would just disagree.

I know all my relationships with school kids have not been total. I have never felt very close to a schooler. I think it is because of the different mindset. They are constantly surrounded by peer pressure, and every time they say something wrong, the other kids tease them or spread rumors about the "stupid" thing that so and so said. I think this makes them come out of their outer shell less often, making them harder and harder to honestly talk to.

When I'm with these friends, my experience is a little different from theirs. It's not as hard for me to dare to stick my neck out. When I do, I sometimes get laughed at, but for the most part it separates me from the average schooler, and a lot of schoolers like that and are attracted to that (even though they don't do it themselves). I am able to speak up because as a homeschooler I'm not constantly in school where teasing is common. Therefore I am not as shy of sticking my neck out. School is not my whole world. When school kids get teased for sticking their necks out, they think that they are not accepted, and since school becomes their whole world, this feeling of being rejected feels twice as strong. When I get teased in school, it does not matter to me that much because school is only a small part of my life. I have so many other aspects of my life where I am accepted that being teased a little in school doesn't matter.

Straight-A Student Quits

A teenager writes:

As I turned the pages of the book that would someday change my entire life, tears started to blur my vision: big fat tears of recognition, of hope. This was me! The whole *Teenage Liberation Handbook* was written about and for me. I couldn't imagine the possibilities it held, but I felt its power. I felt its dreams and fears deep within my bones. I sensed the magic that it brought forth. I could taste the experiences, the freedom. And then, I went back to school.

Something deep within me told me I didn't deserve any of this. I was unworthy to read these pages of wisdom, of passion. I lent it away, hoping it wouldn't be returned, praying I wouldn't have to deal with the kind of dangerous emotion it brought in me. I wasn't willing to accept the responsibilities believing in this book would bring me. I shoved it to the recesses of my mind that I rarely needed and went on with my life.

For three years I withered away. I gave up on dreams that weren't deemed cool. I forgot my love for bikes, for the wonders of the human body, for people and places across oceans and over mountains. I forgot my desires. In school I was the girl everyone respected and hated. I was friends with the right people, invited to all the exclusive parties. I shopped at the right stores and held the power to ruin somebody's day or even their entire high school experience with an unforgiving word or two. I got straight A's without opening a book, even in

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my worst subject, math. All it took was a short skirt and a tight shirt.

It would be unfair to say that school did all that to me. I knew right from wrong, and I knew every time I crossed the unforgivable line. But it is fair to say that schools breed students to believe that this behavior is normal, acceptable. In fact, they show you if you're not crushing those below you, there's something wrong with you.

The principal once called me out of class to tell me what a great role model I was to all the other students. I smiled and thanked him and went to the bathroom, the one without doors to make sure *they* could smell if *anyone* was smoking, and cried. I didn't return to class, but my teacher didn't even question me because he happened to also be my tennis coach. (He is unwilling to believe that a member of *his* team could be anything but the brightest and the best, and he will allow nothing to tarnish the team's grand image.)

Two weeks ago I picked up *that* book again at the library. A week ago I pulled out of school. Today I cried tears of hate at the person I'd become and tears of hope for the person I plan to be. It will be a long road to recovery but I have no fears, because I have all the time and freedom I need.

Perhaps I'll bike through Ecuador or apprentice to a midwife. Perhaps I'll discover myself while working in a clinic deep in the Appalachian mountains. Perhaps I'll just sit and read a hundred great books and be perfectly contented and satisfied. Whatever happens, I feel somewhere deep inside that I've made the best decision I might ever make.

From a later letter:

I've now been unschooling for a full month and am realizing how complex and exciting the lifestyle is. It's been interesting to me to see people's reaction to my decision. The stereotypical roles of hippie-child, misfit, or religious fanatic don't seem to fit me and they seem confused as to how to think of me. I like the idea that I'm stretching their views in a positive way, possibly for the first time. I've heard several, "The homecoming queen did *what?*" It gives me a funny satisfaction.

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Resisting and Questioning

[SS:] Emily Lyons is a Massachusetts teenager who looks at school from an uncommon vantage point. Emily left school in eighth grade and home-schooled for the remainder of that year and the next. Midway through her second year of homeschooling, Emily decided that she no longer wanted to turn in the portfolios that the superintendent required. "I felt that the portfolio wasn't really an honest reflection of what I had been doing," Emily told us. "I would just throw something together at the last minute to satisfy the requirements. It felt dishonest, and I didn't like the way I felt taking part in that kind of game. So instead I sent a letter to the superintendent telling about what I had actually been doing. I wrote about how my life covered the subjects that had to be included in the homeschooling plan." Emily described how she talked about history over dinner with her father, about books she'd read and movies she'd seen "and how I think about them and how I think about the experiences that I have."

Emily knew that the superintendent might not accept such a letter in lieu of the portfolio, and indeed he didn't. She had written that she was prepared to go back to school if the superintendent didn't consider her letter "a good enough plan." So when (after several meetings and discussions between the superintendent and her parents) it was clear that the current plan wouldn't be accepted and that Emily was unwilling to submit a portfolio that she considered dishonest, she entered school that fall, in tenth grade. Her intention was to show that, although she could be compelled to attend school physically, she could not be compelled to learn on school's terms. She attended classes only irregularly and didn't do the assignments the students were given. "It was interesting," she told us, "because they're not used to people saying no in a way that isn't angry. For example, one time a teacher was handing out textbooks and when he came to me I said, 'No, thanks.' He just blew up at me and said I had to take it."

The school gave Emily detentions and suspensions, but Emily and the school essentially seem to have remained at a stalemate for most of the year. In early March, she told us that she attends only a couple of days a week and that when she turns 16 later in the month, she will stop attending entirely as it will then be legally permissible to do so.

Meanwhile, Emily has written several essays that look critically at the school system and encourage students and teachers to consider what school is really all about (she gave these essays out at school). With Emily's permission, we quote from them here. First, from the essay titled "School is not Education":

> We are forced to go to school to get an education, which is considered necessary for a successful life. School is supposed to be about learning. But learning, education, and school are three separate things. ...
>
> What is school trying to do and how well does it do it? School is supposed to be introducing us to culture and art. We should be learning about the best things that this society has to offer us. We should be enjoying it, but after years of being told we have to go to school and we have to do our homework and we have to get here on time and we have to get good grades if we don't want to lead miserable lives, school is a chore. Since school is considered the only way to become educated, education is therefore a chore. Education is presented to us as something long and boring that we all have to do. Art becomes a chore when it is force fed. School is supposed to be giving us a deeper appreciation of beauty. Instead it numbs us.
>
> We are supposed to be learning vocational skills here. School fails at this. For one thing, practical job skills are learned by doing the job, not by studying a hypothetically useful skill. All we are learning to do is take a class about job skills. ... Employers know they will have to train us. But school makes us bad at learning. It makes us think of learning as a long, boring hassle. It makes us depend on authority figures and so-called experts to teach us and tell us we're doing our jobs right instead of thinking for ourselves.
>
> ... Knowledge is not actually what

school is here to give us. It's here to give us grades. What if you went through school, understood everything, learned everything they tried to teach you, but didn't take the tests, didn't turn in the assignments, and didn't get a diploma? Would you get an education? Would it be worth as much as if you had a piece of paper saying you had done it?

We are told that you can't succeed without an education, but when people say that they really mean you can't succeed without credentials.

What is an education? What is the relationship between education and school? What is the relationship between education and success? What is the relationship between education and life? What is success? What do you want? Will school help you to get it?

And from another essay, "Don't Blame the Enforcers":

One of the things the school puts the most effort into is keeping us here. ... Since locking us in would be illegal and mostly unnecessary, it is instead the job of the people who work here to assign punishments to students who disobey. If we break the rules by leaving, we are first condemned to spend extra time in the building, and if that fails we are told we must spend an entire day in one room. These punishments seem to work, at least well enough that mostly we don't leave (or don't get caught leaving). Either we're afraid of the system and care what it thinks, or we just don't want to deal with it, or something in between. Most people just try to stay out of trouble.

The responsibility for enforcing the rules through threat and punishment is placed in the hands of all the adults in the building. Their jobs include watching us and interrogating us and reporting us if we aren't complying with the rules. The natural result is that we blame them.

It is actually the laws that make us angry, but most of our anger is directed at the teachers and officials personally.

It isn't their fault.

Most of them don't have control over what the rules are, they don't necessarily agree with the rules, and clearly they don't enjoy enforcing

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them.

Our teachers may be in a position which makes them act as jailers, but they are still people. They don't want to make us miserable. I think teachers let themselves become jailers for a few reasons. Maybe it's worth it because they like teaching. Or maybe they really believe it helps us. Maybe they think it's just the way things are. They're as stuck in the system as we are.

Consider the situation from a teacher's point of view. They used to be high school students. They probably liked having their lives controlled by school about as much as we do. Like many people, maybe they didn't entirely agree with the system but thought it was necessary. Maybe some of them became teachers in order to be the kind of teachers they wished they had had.

Maybe they thought their ideals wouldn't work in real life. Maybe they found that living up to ideals can get you fired. Maybe they believe they are doing the right thing for us. Maybe they've stopped thinking about it. Maybe they never questioned it.

...Just as for us, learning is not as important to the school as getting a good grade, for teachers, teaching us is not as important to the school as giving us grades. School is as bad a place for a teacher who just wants to teach as it is for a student who just wants to live his or her own way.

Queries

We will forward responses to the following writers and will print the replies of the most general interest.

I wonder about our responsibilities to other homeschoolers, particularly to those who "come after" us. This question was raised by two articles in GWS #126. One, "Taking Community College Classes as a Teenager," includes this statement: "... several poorly behaved kids could cause an adverse reaction toward homeschool kids in community colleges." The other article I'm thinking of was Penny Barker's about her son Jonah and his journey into and out of the Marines. I'm not raising the issue here of whether or not Jonah should have stayed in the Marines. The issue that caught my attention is, how much responsibility do current homeschoolers have to those who come after them, and what is that responsibility?

For example, take Jonah's case. Does his experience now present a more difficult problem for homeschoolers who come after him to be able to enter the Marines without a high school diploma? Especially since apparently there was some consideration of this fact on his applying? Will it cause the Marines to be less inclined to take a non-standard high school graduate? Or will his experience improve the recruiter's ability to tell the truth (because Penny explained that recruiters work on a quota and have been known to lie to meet their numbers, which led to the misinformation Jonah received)? Will a homeschooler taking a stand have a positive result?

We would of course like each situation and each child to be considered on his or her own merits. But is that realistic? I think eventually it will be, when enough homeschooled children become adults. But what are people's thoughts now: how much should we think of how what we do affects the reputation of homeschoolers as a class? – *Barbara Needham of California*

It's hard when you almost don't have rules at home. You want to feel like a rebel but you're a goody-goody. I don't have many stupid rules to break so I end up breaking good ones. Don't you feel like being a rebel but not getting hurt or in trouble? I have nice rules like don't play with matches, don't steal – simple rules usually. My mom and dad helped me realize that if my room caught on fire, my sister or brother could be caught in the blaze. That meant no burning candle wax on my light bulb.

If I said I want to take up hang gliding, my mom would say let's find you some lessons. I want to stay up past my bedtime but I don't have one. I feel like a wimp because I don't rebel that much against mom and dad 'cause the rules are good. Does anybody else have a problem like this? – *Drumlin Brooke of Delaware* ◆

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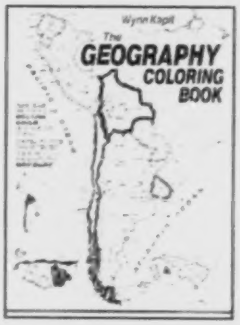

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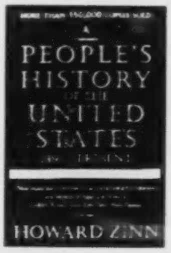

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On Saying "I Don't Know"

We asked young GWS readers to tell us how they feel when someone asks them a question and they don't know the answer. What makes them feel comfortable admitting they don't know, and what makes them defensive or ashamed? When is not knowing a problem and when does it spark curiosity?

If the Other Person Accepts It

From Michael Delaney (CT):

When I don't know the answer to a question someone asks me, I'll usually say so, or make it readily apparent that I don't know. If I don't know how I feel on the topic (whether I hold no opinion or I really don't know where I stand), I'll sometimes let the other person talk about it until I get a feel for what they're saying. Or I'll say I have no opinion. Or I'll change the subject.

If I'm talking with friends, I can most definitely say "I don't know," whether it's "I don't know what the square route of 32475 is" or "I don't know how to get to Starbucks from here." If I'm at work (I work part time as a systems administrator for an engineering place) and a piece of software is giving me trouble and I honestly don't know why, I can say I don't know. And of course, I'll try to fix it.

What makes the difference in how comfortable I feel saying I don't know? How well I know the person, how well I know how they would react. That affects how I phrase what I say. If someone really expects me to know the answer, I might say, "I'm not sure, but I can find out," rather than just saying, "I don't know." If the situation is relaxed and comfortable, it's a lot easier to say I don't know. I suppose the person I'm talking to could take some of the pressure off, too, by not relying on me so heavily to know the answer. Or accept that I don't know it and move on from there.

There are plenty of times when not knowing something makes me curious to find out more. If I hear a computer or networking term that I'm unfamiliar with, I will try to familiarize myself with it. Becoming curious about something unfamiliar has happened more in social situations than anywhere else. If someone in the room knows something and it catches my interest, I will try to talk to that person and learn more about it.

Daring to Speak Up

From Ravenna Fahey (NM):

When someone asks me a question and I don't know the answer to it, the way I feel about it is always different. Sometimes I want to learn what the answer is, or I want to learn more about the topic. Sometimes I feel mad angry, or frustrated. Other times, I just feel plain stupid, like, "I have been studying this forever; I should know the answer to this question." Most of the time I feel OK saying "I don't know" or "I have no clue" or something like that, but I think it really depends on the situation. I would say that homeschoolers have a much easier time saying "I don't know" because we don't have a bunch of people (classmates, teachers, etc.) staring at us when we have to admit that we don't know something.

I'm taking an electronics class at our local Career Enrichment Center. The class is all guys and one girl (me). I'm only 14 and this class is for juniors and seniors in high school, so being the only girl, younger than all of them, and homeschooled, I felt that I really needed to be as cool as possible and not mess up. For the first few weeks of class, I sat there praying that our teacher wouldn't ask me a question that I couldn't answer. But then I started to see that if I just sat there and never opened my mouth, I would never learn anything. I looked at it like this: part of learning is saying "I don't know" and making mistakes – a simple concept, but hard to learn. It's taken me 14+ years to learn this and I still forget it all the time!

Most of the time, if I don't know something, I just want to learn all I can about it by either reading or asking someone I trust to tell me the answer without making me feel stupid. For example, I play ice hockey and one day I was looking at players' stats and I didn't know what a +/– was, so I asked my older sister about it and she explained it to me.

Feeling She *Should* Know

From Dillon Wright-Fitzgerald (PA):

As a lifelong autodidact (I'm now 17), I've always wanted to get to know what I don't know. Usually, I *am* interested to find out more; often the best thing to do is just admit it: "I don't know much about that. Could you explain it?" This is the brave way to go. In the past I've found it so much easier just to pretend I know what's being talked about, but it's far more rewarding to actually *learn* something from the exchange by asking for enlightenment. Similarly, admitting that I'm not sure where I stand on a particular issue can be a way to explore that issue. I can ask myself, why don't I know where I stand? And why does the person with whom I'm speaking know?

It's less comfortable to admit ignorance when the subject is something that one "should" know, for some reason or another. I was once chastised by the owner of a bookstore for not being highly skilled in math. She attributed this to my homeschooling, which she believed was robbing me of a good *general* education. We were hotly debating this subject over the checkout counter, when I handed her my purchase. She proceeded to ask if I could figure out what the tax would be – to test my math knowledge. I was flustered, couldn't think straight, and have never been able to do math problems quickly anyway, so I had to admit that I couldn't. She was smug, to say the least. Yet her tactics backfired: if her intent was to challenge me to confront and correct my deficiencies, she failed. I was not shaken into awareness; I was deeply hurt. I am convinced that humiliating someone in such a manner is not the way to inspire them to conquer a problematic subject. Rather, humiliation seems to imbed the wounds even deeper. As I was walking away from the bookstore with my new copy of *Middlemarch* in hand, I could think of only one thing: that this same owner had, prior to our discussion, been flipping through a biography of Thomas Hardy, trying to interest me in it and saying something about "... when he wrote *Heart of Darkness*." I had felt a little shocked, since I knew that the author of *Heart of Darkness* was Joseph Conrad, not Hardy. But my tact won the battle, and I had decided not to correct her. Walking away from the bookstore, I angrily wished I had.

Yet why use my own knowledge as a weapon? One of the most important things I have learned is that in order to feel comfortable, I have to cultivate an inner peace. When I feel comfortable with myself, I'm also comfortable with what I know, and not knowing something isn't enough to shake me. I would say that it's my *own* state that matters foremost, not that of the other person. If I don't feel that comfort, no matter who I'm speaking to – a good friend, or a complete stranger – I can end up feeling defensive about what I do and don't know. But in a spirit of peace, the need to defend myself disappears.

Uncomfortable situations have also arisen with my peers – many of whom assume that since we're from the same generation we will have knowledge of exactly the same things – on topics ranging from rock groups to molecular biology. I have always been less comfortable with admitting what I don't know to my peers. If the rock band is popular, why don't I know about it? If I'm a successful homeschooler, shouldn't I have taken AP Biology? Just to say "I don't know" in those cases feels like a failure. It's difficult, but it's surely necessary; I feel more strongly about this kind of honesty as I grow older. It's a wake-up call, I think, to let the other person know that their assumption of what's common knowledge is not always correct. Our brains are not in a race for wisdom. Real

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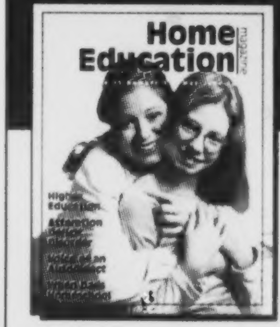

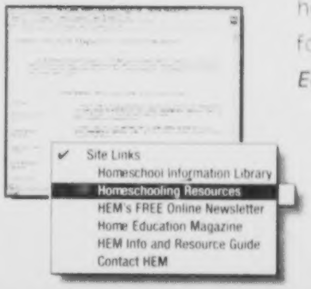
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wisdom belonged to the tortoise who savored each moment of the journey, and not to the hare whose eyes were fixed only on the finish line.

Despite the negative experiences, I am convinced that not knowing something can be positive – if you use it that way. I will try to learn as much as I need to learn about the unknown, through inquiring of the person who's knowledgeable and through investigating on my own. The key word is "need" – what I feel a need to learn, I will learn. I believe that all learning happens in its own good time. As people, we need to be aware of our learning patterns and blocks, and I believe we delve into the unknown only when we are ready. The best kind of learning is that which feels well worth undertaking.

Everyone Needs Others' Help

From Dylan Spevack of Quebec:

Sometimes it *is* important to know all the answers. I wouldn't want to be in a plane with a pilot who didn't know what to do if he hit turbulent weather, and if the government officials didn't know how to run a government – no that's a bad example. But most of the time it's OK to say I don't know.

In his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People,* Dale Carnegie says, "If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically." Since a lot of people see not knowing something as being wrong, the same advice should apply there as well. It doesn't do anyone any good to pretend you know everything, and it can often be a very bad idea. When teachers pretend that they are all powerful, I try to find something they don't know, and usually it isn't hard. I find that the less we know the more we pretend to know. There are very few people who are willing to admit a lack of knowledge, and that willingness shows who the wise ones in a crowd are. The people who admit their limitations are the ones who achieve great things because they are willing to say "I need help" and then find it.

I believe everyone has different skills and experiences when they come to a situation, and no one can have everything it takes to get a job done. For example, in the process of writing a story (something I like to do), there is, of course, the writer, the one who puts the words down on paper and crafts them to fit the characters that she or he developed. When writers need to know a particular piece of information, however, they will find a book that gives that information to them, because they can't necessarily experience it themselves. Then they give the story to the editor, who must find the mistakes in the work and fix them or have them fixed. I don't know of a writer who would want to edit their own work more than they have to, and I don't know of too many who could.

The same goes for any job that needs to be done. Nobody can do everything alone. But it seems people still try to do things themselves and in the end they destroy their chances of success. Just to be clear, I am no fan of working in groups; in fact I try to work alone as often as possible. I try, though, to ask for help when I need it, because there are people out there with infinitely more experience than I will ever have.

Some Friends Tease

From Ruth Delaney (CT):

When someone asks me a question I don't know the answer to, how I feel really depends on the situation and the person who is asking. If I know the person, that makes it very easy to simply say that I don't know, though I do have some friends that I would avoid saying "I don't know" to, because they might laugh or tease me.

I've had experiences with non-homeschoolers where I have said that I'm a homeschooler and immediately some of them will ask me a question or quiz me about various things. When that happens and I don't know the answer, I either come up with a witty retort or, when my polite side rejects that idea, I

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have two options: answer the question as best I can, or say that I must not have studied that subject yet. Fortunately, I never remember feeling ashamed, defensive, or uncomfortable in a situation of that sort. If I did, it didn't leave a lasting impression. Also, I don't know why, but I don't seem to get into those situations very often, so none stand out as particularly hard or easy to get out of.

In a place of learning, I would much rather ask a question and say "I don't know" than to pretend I know. When I first started studying dance, I had no idea what to do when it came to competitions, but these wonderful older girls told me everything and helped me along the way in the competitive world of Irish step dancing. This was the nicest thing anyone could have done for me because I never had to say that I didn't know what to do with my hair or dress or anything, because they had already told me.

Asking vs. Testing

From Yonatan Aldort (WA):

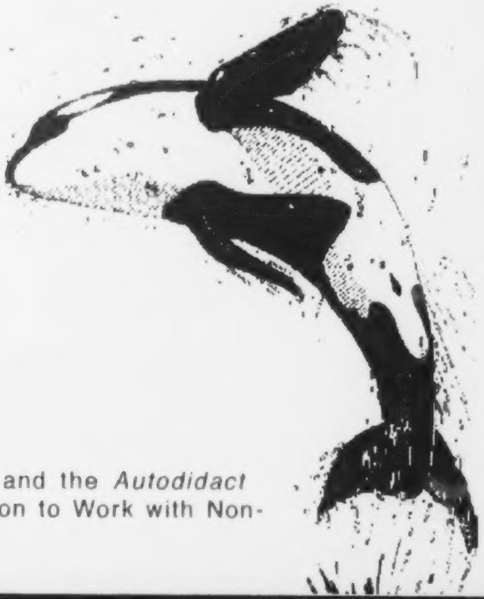
Basically, I am not afraid to say that I don't know something. If I am asked by an adult who clearly is trying to explain something to me which I am interested in, I would just say "no I don't" or "yes I do." Or, if someone asks something because they don't know and need the information, I feel just fine telling them that I don't know, and I may help them to find the answer.

Yet sometimes I don't feel comfortable, and that depends on how it is asked. If I am asked in a way that appears I am being tested, I usually say that I don't like being tested. All my situations in which I don't want to openly admit that I don't know something take place when children who go to school find out that I don't go and begin testing me to see whether I know enough. All those times, just saying "I don't know" makes me open to the children's criticism of the fact that I do not go to school, which bothers me. What I mean is that every time I admit openly, to any child who is testing me, that I don't know something, he or she will tell everybody else and everyone will make fun of me and even physically disturb me (as I am fairly small for my age).

At times when I feel like I am being tested and I am defensive about not knowing things, I usually try to calm myself and whoever I am talking to by asking them, "What do you like about it?" (for instance: math). I then rely on what kind of reaction I get. Sometimes the reaction is that the person does not even like the subject that they are testing me about.

I actually think that the subjects which people dislike the most are the ones they like to test people with. I chose math as an example because that's what other children always test me on. At those times I back off and just leave the uncomfortable situation because I am not interested in being tested.

So, saying that I don't know things does not bother me as long as the question is an honest interest in the subject or in sharing information with me. ◆



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Education for Right Now

A Conversation with William Ayers

William Ayers has been working on behalf of young people for many years; I first learned about his Children's Community in Ann Arbor when John Holt talked about it in *What Do I Do Monday?* Today, Ayers is, among other things, associate professor of education at the University of Illinois and co-founder of the Chicago School Reform Collaborative.

Recently, I picked up his book *To Become a Teacher*, a collection of essays by several educators. In Ayers's conclusion to the book, he quotes John Gatto's by-now famous Teacher of the Year speech and then proposes ten key changes that could make a difference. One of them in particular caught my eye. He writes,

"Teachers could decide that the best preparation for a meaningful future life lies in creating a meaningful present life. ... The work of school, then, would not be constructed as bitter medicine, hurriedly swallowed on someone else's promise that it will be profitable to you 'someday.' In fact, 'preparation' would no longer frame issues of teaching and learning ..."

What a quietly radical suggestion! What struck me was how directly this speaks to homeschoolers as well. So many of parents' worries are about whether kids will be adequately prepared for the future. What would happen if we stopped focusing on preparation?

In the following conversation, William Ayers and I explore these questions.

Susannah Sheffer: Take me inside that sentence, "The best preparation for a meaningful future life lies in creating a meaningful present." What were you thinking there?

William Ayers: What I had in mind is that life is always lived in the present tense, really. I think that we start making sense of the world from day one: we wonder about everything that comes before us and try to sort it out. It's not as if we just passively imbibe lessons from a stern older figure and then magically, at the age of 21, are able to think through important questions in a complex world. No, all the questions and problems have meaning right now, even if you're a child.

Take something as simple as learning to read. In my view, there's no way to learn to read separate from the recognition of the power and value of reading and communicating – speaking, listening, writing. From the first day, I want kids to experience reading and writing as integrated, sense-making activities. Anything you do in that regard has to be full of the importance for the present. Again, being powerful and effective and capable in your life isn't something that comes to you ready made at some magic moment of maturity. It's constructed along the way, as you grow. Which means that you can't just say to kids, "Do this now, because someday later on you'll see why it's important." That idea, that you have to take a bunch of bitter pills now so that you'll be a good person later on, ends up teaching the lesson that bitter bills are your lot in life.

SS: That seems to be a big issue. John Holt tells in one of his books about a mother who said to him, "I think you're making a mistake by making your classroom so interesting, because when kids grow up, they're going to have to do a lot of things they don't like." There's a pervasive attitude that kids should prepare for the hardships of life by learning now that everything isn't all fun and games.

WA: I remember the early days of Head Start, when there was an actual argument being made that kids should learn self-defense at age 3 or 4 because it's a brutal world and they ought to learn to be violent in response to it. Many of us said no to that. We said, the best preparation for surviving in a tough world is for children to feel a tremendous sense of entitlement and love and joy all around them. Then they can face things with an inner core of strength that they couldn't possibly have if they were being beaten up all the time. I think the best preparation for life's inevitable defeats is a long line of successes, just as the best preparation for inevitable heartbreak is a sense of love and connectedness. You don't get ready for the pain of life by experiencing pain endlessly; you get ready by experiencing love and joy. That's what I think. And I see it in my three kids who are now grown. When my son Malik came to the realization that he would never play second base for the Cubs, it wasn't devastating to him because he had had such a long line of successes before that. He could use his desire to be a baseball player – even if it didn't work out – as a way of vaulting into the next thing.

What we deny kids in schools is a sense that they're worthwhile here and now. If you feel that you're worthy of a full life, that will drive you forward in a way that all the AIDS prevention and pregnancy prevention and drug prevention programs can never do.

SS: So there you are in fact talking about the future.

WA: But again, I think one's sense of having a meaningful future is completely connected to the sense of being a worthwhile person right now. One of the things that drives me nuts about schools is that there's often a sense, especially in the urban high schools where I work, that nothing about your presence here is worthwhile. Everything about you is a deficit, a danger, something we have to deal with or remediate. If everything about you, your family, and your neighborhood needs repair, then what is it that allows you to put one foot in front of the other right now? This is part of the reason why about half the kids go on strike and walk away from our urban schools altogether, and many more simply turn off. They say, "Why should I submit to this?" Middle class kids submit, even if school is boring and numbing, because of the belief that it will pay off. But what if you've seen people submit to it with no payoff? What if you have an aunt who has a high school diploma but is unemployable? If you see that, and if each day you're putting up not just with boredom and irrelevance but humiliation and violence, why would you stay? We see classrooms in Chicago where half the kids feel that way, and it creates a culture of despair and anger and resentment and cynicism.

SS: That whole idea of taking a bitter pill now because it will be important later on comes up in the area of specific curriculum content, too. There's the sense that kids can't understand why something is important or necessary, so they should just do it because they're told to. It's only the adult who can see the meaning and relevance.

WA: It's really a failure of nerve and imagination on the part of educators when we make that argument. If we think stuff is worth knowing, it's up to us to build the bridge between it and whatever kids are interested in. It's a matter of knowing particular kids well enough to know what in their own experience will grab them to link them up to deeper ways of knowing. If a child happens to like cooking eggs, you can go from eggs to reading to writing to social studies to civics to the moon, if you want. But instead of thinking that way, we think, "In the second grade science curriculum we need two weeks on rocks and two weeks on volcanoes." We break everything into separate pieces, which misses the point that knowledge is a web of interlinking ways of being and knowing and expressing. Kids are thrust into a world that's vivid and moving and colorful, and they're interested in it: in dinosaurs, bugs, music, the shapes of things, how things sound – and every one of those things is the beginning of a whole curriculum of life. It's goofy that we act as if all that is irrelevant and only a few things that we've decided on are the worthwhile things to learn.

Take reading again as such an obvious example. Kids want to make sense of the world. They live in a world of print. What's the difference if they hook into reading at 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8? Among my own three kids, one read at 4, one at 6, one at 9. He had a lot of other things going on and it took him longer to read, but why is that a major issue?

SS: I want to go back to that adult who says kids are going to have to be prepared for the tough world out there. Homeschooling kids tell us about people saying to them, "What's going to happen when you get out into the real world?" Of course, they often answer, "I'm the one who *is* out in the world," but even leaving that point aside, there's this question of what the *real* world is. Are kids who are having a happy childhood and doing interesting things living in some kind of fantasy land?

WA: I think these questions from adults to kids are a projection of adult ambivalence about childhood. It also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Adults who are unhappy may say to kids, "This is real life," instead of holding out for the possibility of something better. But, of course, all worlds are real, including the world of possibility, the world of hope. When people tell kids they aren't living in the real world, market values are in ascendance, the only ones esteemed and worthwhile. Values like caring, concern, dedication, compassion, and hope may seem unrealistic, but in order to live fully we need to have one foot in the world that is, and one foot in a world that is not yet, but could be.

SS: What's the history of education's emphasis on preparation rather than on creating a meaningful life right now? Why has education traditionally been thought of in terms of preparation?

WA: The idea of education as a bitter pill goes right back to the beginning of public education in this country. If you look back on that early discussion, some of it was full of hope for a civic society, but you'll also find that a lot of it was about saving Western American Puritanical society from the immigrant hoards. There's always been this strand in our thinking that says education is not a place for self-discovery or meaning-making, it's a place to literally be coerced into a mainstream that's already settled, already decided. A lot of the talk we hear today about standards is filled with the same kind of punitive notion that the standards are already settled, from above, by authoritative voices. Standards in this context really means standardization.

SS: And now to bring this to the personal level. I know that a lot of parents do still worry that their children won't be well-prepared – particularly if the kids are growing up outside the usual paths. It's one of the most common fears, even among parents who have specifically chosen an unconventional path. What would you say to a parent who, let's say, told you about something a child wasn't doing yet, and said, "I'm worried that he won't be prepared"?

WA: Well, first I'd have a sympathetic response. I don't want to blow that off as if I automatically know better. I'd say, "Let's think about it together, let's figure it out. What does the child like to do?" Well, maybe it turns out the child likes rap music and knows all the lyrics, so let's talk about the possibility of typing that out and making a music book. I'd say to the parent, if you're really worried about his not reading, let's think of some tactics we might pursue, based on interest and relevance. That would be one whole tack I might take. But I might urge simultaneously that we spend some time looking at what the child can do well, what he cares about and is committed to, so we can see that child more fully rather than just obsessing about perceived deficits. I think schools are masterful at seeing kids as deficit-ridden rather than as people of assets. I go into high schools and think to myself, here's this pulsating mass of human energy and it's never put to good use, it's never tapped. Instead we say we know best, follow this. And when they don't, we bring in extra resources to suppress them and control them.

SS: One of the things that comes up in anxiety about the future is the question of whether you really can guarantee anything about the future anyway. When we do something with a child today, are we doing it because we believe it will have a lasting impact? Will it actually guarantee some kind of later success? In the Innovators in Education series that I edit for Heinemann, we've just reissued George Dennison's book *The Lives of Children*, and George's widow, Mabel Dennison; writes a new foreword in which she reflects on their experience thirty years ago. One thing she says is that back then, she had a greater belief in education's ability to guarantee success over the long haul. Now she thinks about the three families from the school with whom she's still in contact. One is doing very well, one about the same as in those days, and one is doing quite badly. So it's easy sometimes to wonder: was all the effort worthwhile? Or should we not think in terms of what the long-term effect might be, but just concentrate on what makes sense to do right now.

WA: If the question is, can education guarantee success, I think the answer is certainly no. In fact, I begin with despair; I say we have to gasp at some of the terrible things human beings are capable of. But I don't have a legalistic mind; I don't think we need to marshal evidence one way or the other. What I say is that hope is what gives us the ability to act toward a better future even in spite of the terrible reality we endure, the devastating evidence. What else is there except the possibility of a better life? We need not be naive, but at the same time we need not be paralyzed. Again, we have to have one eye on the world that could be. I also think – maybe this comes from getting older! – that we're on this earth for such a short time that every day actually does count. So just having a good day today, and another good day tomorrow, does begin to add up.

SS: So if I were to look in on you doing something with a child – anything that felt like a good and a meaningful thing to be doing today – would you say you were doing it because it seemed like the right thing to do with that child today, or because you hoped it might have some longer term effect?

WA: Both. I think we don't need to make that distinction. In some ways, separating those two things might be part of the problem. It's the alienation of the present from some imagined future that leads to the problem. Instead you can say, "Something that's good now will probably be good later on, but it's also good right now." You can't predict how things will turn out, and you certainly can't guarantee anything, but teaching is a great act of faith. Raising children might be the ultimate act of faith. But your question gets right at the nub of one of the agonizing parts of being a human being: there are no guarantees. If something seems like the right thing to do, you do it, but you don't know what it all means. Parents and teachers have to do two things at once, in the same gesture: act on their best judgment, and at the same time doubt themselves. They have to be sure that they *don't* always know. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Working with a Sculptor

Selina Hunt (NY) writes:

I just returned home from three months in New York City, where I was working with Susan, a sculptor. Although New York City is only 2 1/2 hours from my home on Shelter Island, it is a very different place. Susan lives and works in a loft she shares with sculpture she has created over the past forty years (and her husband, cats, rabbits, and birds). I was surrounded by figures, many life-size or larger, in polyester resin, cement, plaster, and bronze. In this collection you can see groups of work created in different times in her life and the themes that connect them and make them hers.

I became very familiar with Susan's sculptures even before being in their midst. Susan and her work were introduced to me by Suzanne, Susan's business partner, with whom I worked when she lived on Shelter Island. I did computer work for Suzanne, cataloging the images and information about each piece of Susan's. That work evolved into the idea of my coming into New York City for three months.

My work there focused on a few different projects. One was pulling together a bibliography by taking important bits of information from newspaper and magazine reviews that featured Susan. It was a great way to get a sense of Susan's life up to this point, to see all that she had done as a working artist. Another project, the one I spent the most time on, was constructing a presentation packet, sent out to Susan's collectors and friends, offering an edition of her sculpture for sale. In assembling the packets, I learned how to cast paper, a medium I liked working with. Another project was packaging and shipping the bronze relief pieces people had purchased in a previous sales offering. We shipped most of them but I hand-delivered those going to people in Manhattan. Some of my other responsibilities were making copies, running errands, word-processing, and accompanying Susan to select and buy art supplies. The experience was a great glimpse into the life of an artist. I saw the real goings-on of each day, the hours dedicated, all the details in the creation of each piece and the need for organization and processing.

A rather unexpected part of the experience was a look into personality and ways of thinking. On certain topics, Suzanne and Susan had very different opinions and approaches to things than I did. Although it can be challenging to disagree, I learned a lot and found it quite amazing to see how many ways there are to think about and look at things.

I worked five days a week, usually for about seven hours a day, more when we were working on a deadline for mailing. In my non-working hours I had some studio time, sculpting in clay, with Susan's coaching. There really is a great deal of precision to modeling clay, I found. Susan showed me how she puts clay on, creating the basic form, and then putting on little tiny pieces to catch detail and shape. I enjoyed it, even though the process included times when I was so frustrated I wanted to smoosh the clay back into a little wad and never see it again. I made one piece in clay, a bell pepper, that took me a few weeks to finish (though it's really hard to decide what makes something finished). I then started another project, an acorn squash, which I found *really* hard. Susan encouraged me to try another pepper instead, which I was somewhat reluctant to do. I didn't really want to be repeating myself, but it turned out to be great advice. In just a couple of days, I was able to get almost to the point where I had stopped with the other pepper. That was very exciting, and was proof of how much I had learned in the creation of the first pepper.

I also enjoyed just spending time in the city, wandering and happening upon interesting things, going to quite a few museums and art galleries, seeing some amazing theatre productions, and spending time with friends. Although I was very busy, I still felt quite homesick and lonely at times. It was a weird, torn feeling. On the one hand, I felt it was really right for me, where I was and what I was doing. On the other hand, I missed being at home with my family. So far, three months has been the longest I've spent away from home. It has been a manageable time for me: long enough to get into the experience but not too daunting at the outset. And by the end, I'm really looking forward to returning home.

At 17, I'm trying to figure out what I enjoy doing and what direction I want to go in. Susan's passion for her work was a great example of how, as many people have told me, caring about what you do is really at the heart of it all.

Finding Ways to Study Art History

Emerie Geiger Snyder (MD) writes:

Pushing my way through the crowd, I suddenly found myself looking up at the image of a little Spanish princess in a white dress. I had no idea that this beautiful and haunting painting would lead me on a years-long journey through the history of art.

In May of 1997, as part of a family trip, I was visiting El Prado, Madrid's great art museum. Two paintings – by famous artists I'd never heard of – caught my eye. They were: *Las Meninas [The Maids of Honor]* (1656) by Diego Velázquez, and *The Family of Charles IV* (1800) by Francisco Goya. They interested me partly because I had questions about certain figures and symbolism in the pictures, but both were simply captivating, especially the Velázquez painting with the 5-year-old princess. I wanted to learn more about these amazing painters; I remember asking my grandfather the next day, on a plane headed for home, where exactly to put the accent mark in "Velázquez" so that I'd be able to look up books about the artist. Since then I've read more than 20 fascinating art history books, visited dozens of exhibits, taken courses, and developed ideas about the artistic lineage of Velázquez. Researching those two painters from Spain has led me to countless other interesting topics, as well as artists from all over the world.

After almost a year of devouring every book and visiting every exhibit that had anything to do with my favorite artists, I began to feel the need for friends who shared my interests. For three years, I've been part of a small, tight-knit group of homeschoolers, and I consider each of them my best friend, but none of them could relate to my art history fascination. My parents support me in whatever I do, and they were happy to go with me to galleries and talk with me about my discoveries, but they both have full-time jobs, which makes scheduling difficult. So, I placed a short notice in the local homeschool newsletters asking if any other teens had similar interests and wanted to form a museum-visiting/art discussion group. Nothing happened. Eventually one person responded, and by that time I was busy exploring art history in other ways.

A formal class seemed a likely next step, so I looked through descriptions of courses at local colleges and art schools. When I inquired at the University of Maryland, I was told that because I was still in "high school," I'd have to submit a long list of things in order to be admitted, including my GPA (as an unschooler, my response was "Huh?"), and an essay describing "why I want to participate in the concurrent enrollment program." It seemed like a big production for just one class. So, I ended up choosing an Art Appreciation class at Montgomery College, a local community college. Trying to enroll was frustrating, since no one seemed to know what to do with me. They told me that the principal of my school needed to write a recommendation letter confirming my grade level (supposedly, I had to be in 11th, which I wasn't according to my age, but grade levels don't mean much to me so I didn't worry about it). I joked with my mom, saying, "So, would you like to be the principal, or shall I?" Eventually we got a letter from Manfred Smith of The Learning Community, an umbrella group. His letter was wonderfully straightforward; it said something like, "Emerie Snyder is enrolled full time in The Learning Community as an Independent Learner, and she has my permission to attend the class," making no mention of grade level whatsoever. The Early Placement Counselor accepted it, and agreed to waive the required placement exam in basic reading/writing "because your mother is here and she says that you read a lot. If you'd come alone, I probably would not have admitted you."

Around the same time, my mom saw a notice in the newspaper seeking

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volunteer docents to lead tours at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) in Washington, DC. The ad mentioned that the docent training would be equivalent to a college-level art history course, and did not mention any age or experience requirements, so I decided to find out more. The volunteer coordinator explained over the phone that the class would meet once a week, for two hours, for about 30 weeks. Docents would start working at the information desk after three months, and would be qualified to lead tours once they graduated from the training course. The commitment was for two years. Quite a difference from the 15-week, two-exam, one-paper college course, but it seemed worthwhile, so I chose to do both.

Upon hearing that I was 15 years old, the museum volunteer coordinator said, "Well, I don't think we accept anyone under 18, but I really don't see why not. Let me check it out and I'll get back to you." She did and it was fine with everyone concerned, so I came to the orientation session which included a short audition (each prospective docent was asked to say one sentence about some painting in the gallery). It was clear to the people running the course that I was serious about being there and they accepted me.

The information I learned from each of the very different classes was engaging, and of great use to me. Focusing more on how to look at art, the Art Appreciation class covered only very briefly the historical context. In contrast, the class at the museum has gone into great depth about art history, only it's the history that you don't hear anywhere else – that of women artists.

I think the main difference between the two courses involved the students' goals. The teacher of the college class assumed that no one in the class knew anything about art, or even cared; they were just there to get a required credit. And sadly, that was true of most of the students. While the experience was worthwhile for the content, it reminded me of why I don't want to be in school. Everyone – the professor and the students – seemed to care much more about test scores and grades than about learning.

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On the other hand, the docent training's purpose is to prepare the students for their roles as representatives of the museum and teachers of visitors. Not only are we given huge amounts of information about individual artists and works of art, but there's an emphasis on presenting that information to visitors in a clear, concise, and engaging manner. And the assumption is that all the new docents are eager to learn; they'd have no reason to be there otherwise.

One wonderful thing about working and learning at the museum is the people. Everyone is friendly, welcoming, and interested in art. Although I never imagined it would happen this way, I have found a group of friends who share my interests.

History Through Computer Games

Ira Handler (NY) writes:

Recently our son Josh has focused on computer games that take place in ancient or medieval times. Age of Empires is one game which explores the period from the Stone Age through the Iron Age. As in most such games, the goal is to expand your empire by managing the economy well and to destroy opponents. However, the game enables subtle approaches such as alliances and subsequent treachery as well as direct military campaigns. The game draws the participants into ancient history using replicas of the buildings and elements of the army and navy. Josh commented that ancient societies spent more of their effort on gathering food and building materials than we do in the society we live in.

Another game, Lords of the Realm, explores medieval history. The game is set in 13th-century England. The object is for the player to conquer one or more computer opponents to become king. Each player starts with a county, a few serfs, and a herd of dairy cows. The best strategy is to build up the county, establish a diversified economy, manufacture defensive weapons, and build strong castles. Once there is sufficient wealth, one hires mercenaries and builds an army to attack enemies in neighboring countries. Lords of the Realm has an interesting framework for negotiations between the players. Players can exchange compliments and insults and can form alliances. Josh is particularly interested in the Old English forms of insults, thoughtfully provided by the game's programmers, including the opportunity to reply and create his own insults.

Finally, the game Knights and Merchants explores the economic dependencies in medieval societies. For example, it is not possible to manufacture weapons until the serfs can eat at the Inn. The Inn can't feed the serfs until there are farms producing grain, mills grinding the grain, bakers baking bread, vineyards producing grapes, vintners bottling wine, etc.

These games provide an alternative approach to studying ancient and medieval history. While Josh hasn't had to memorize dates, famous names, or events during that historical period, he has gained insight into how medieval society functioned, particularly the importance of alliances with neighbors and the necessity of a diversified economy, so that neither bad weather nor the Black Death can wipe out your society.

Home School Band

Debbie Dannucci of California writes:

This has been an exciting, fun, and occasionally stressful first year for all of us in the Home School Band. We were not sure at first that we could find enough people interested to even start the band. But we sent out a flyer to all local homeschool groups and sent press releases to local newspapers and hoped for the best. Now, five months later, there are 35 band members, with more members still joining as word gets around. Ours is a beginning band, which meets twice a week. Everyone started out on either clarinet, trumpet, or flute, although some have since switched to saxophone, drums, or trombone.

Even more than the band's success, it's the members of the band (official and unofficial) that so impress and inspire me. When I look around at everyone assembled there, I marvel at what we can accomplish together – this diverse group of people who have homeschooling in common. Most of the members range in age from 9-14, but there are a few 8 year olds, and five of us are moms.

But those are only the official members. If you look around, you see other parents. Solomon sits next to his son, helping him keep count. Claire sits next to her two boys, helping them follow the challenging new music. Another mom, Julie, helps the five new drummers in the back. Then there's Holly, a mom and accomplished clarinetist, and Tami, an 18-year-old homeschooler and accomplished pianist, both of whom played with the band at the band's Christmas concert. So many people have come forward to volunteer their time (and sometimes their money).

Last, but definitely not least, there's Mr. Valentine, our director. He's larger than life, an imposing figure who dares us to play the challenging pieces, keeps us laughing, and thoroughly enjoys himself. The kids adore him, and he's always looking out for them – encouraging those who most need it, finding additional music for the more accomplished, and wondering about how best to meet all our musical needs. We were an unknown to him in the beginning – he was used to teaching band in public school. (I like to think he is learning from us as well as the other way around.) He wasn't sure how it would work with all those different ages together, and, without grades, how could he get the kids to practice?

But, as we all found out, it does work. Eight-year-olds sit next to 14-year-olds and we all play together. We are all musicians and band members, regardless of our age. The most accomplished players are not only older kids, as might be anticipated; some are also among the youngest. Band members do practice – because they like to. And the band is successful. For a group of beginners, we're starting to sound pretty good!

For more on homeschoolers making music, see GWS #122 and #126

Finding Out if They Measure Up

Candace Thayer-Coe writes from the Philippines:

My favorite response to the curriculum question comes from Sandy Keane who, when asked what curriculum she used, responded "passion." I have always remembered that, and hold in high esteem the idea that one's passions are curriculum enough.

Here in Manila, there are very few people who homeschool, and those who do definitely do school at home. Over the years, we increasingly preferred our children to follow their interests and passions. Since I was pursuing artistic projects at home, it was easy to incorporate our children into my life.

One day our son, Christopher, at 8 1/2, decided he would try school. We always believed that if the children chose to go to school we would support them. Christopher enjoyed some of school, especially when it was creative and inspiring, but when it was demanding and dull he became disinterested. He went for a full year, including two sessions of summer school, and then began to show his autodidactic tendencies and announced one day, "They are trying to change me into someone I am not, and they can't do that." He did not continue with another year.

His sister Amber-Grae was interviewed for first grade when she was 6. She has always been naturally competi-

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tive and wanted to do what Christopher could do. She had been in the pre-first-grade class at summer school and was bored with its activities. She was looking forward to first grade, but could not read the words on the interviewer's list. She could read other words, but not the ones on the list. So, the woman wanted to put her in kindergarten with 5-year-olds, like the summer school class she had endured. Amber-Grae was properly insulted and decided she would have no part of their establishment anyway.

At home their talents flourish. The peforming arts continue to be a big interest; they study and perform professionally. They interact with the real world and are allowed to delve into their interests, completely submerge themselves in the area of their curiosities.

Along with this I watch for signals and listen for requests from them. I was really struck one day by my son's embarrassment to write farewell messages with friends in their theater programs, after a splendid six-week experience in a drama workshop together. He was afraid to do it because he felt that his spelling was not very good. With some encouragement from me he got over it and joined the fun of writing in each other's programs. I was glad I was there that day, to support his skills and abilities.

Sometimes Christopher and Amber-Grae need to prove to themselves what they can do. They expressed a desire to spell better; accordingly, we began using a spelling book that they liked and thought would be helpful. With a united decision to follow several additional texts and workbooks, we created a schedule. We were happy because it helped us all to make use of the books we had acquired over the years. This schedule included all their performing arts classes and performances, computer and math classes outside the house, along with tutors – including and especially Dad – in math and science, while I facilitated their interests in English language studies, social studies, and history.

Most of Christopher and Amber-Grae's friends are children who spend a lot of time in school. The interaction with these friends definitely affects our children. Sometimes, they want to know if they measure up and can do what their friends are doing. As parents, we too get a little nervous wondering if our children will be ready and prepared to fulfill their greatest desires. Now, I know I must trust in them and in ourselves, but that old "school head" rears up to cause doubt or something felt as justified concern.

One day we found the Greater Vancouver Distance Education School on the Internet. We showed it to the children, and they were interested (Vancouver is where we return periodically, and we plan to retire there in a couple of years). Christopher was just 14 and Amber-Grae almost 12. They were impressed with the content and decided to try the program.

Our GVDES counselor was very understanding and supportive of our homeschooling. She told us that grades were optional, as was the sending in of finished work. At first, to send in and receive grades. But as their enthusiasm for the restricted curriculum requirements lessened, and as they began to resent its control of their daily time, they valued the idea of grades less and less. We discussed our reasons for wanting the curriculum. It was clear that they wanted to know if they could do what their friends have to do every day. They also wanted to be familiar with what children in Vancouver are doing in schools. They found that they were aware of the subject matter beyond the curriculum in some areas, and in other areas they were maybe not as quick or interested as some of their friends. They decided that it doesn't matter, because all of those differences define who they are.

It did not take them long to realize that they did not have to send in their work for someone else's grades and comments. They decided that their Dad is quite good enough at helping them, having taught university courses himself in the past. We decided the curriculum could be useful even without grades, and began to see the curriculum as a consultant. We hire a consultant to help us accomplish something we want to achieve. That consultant can be a person, class, lecture, book, or curriculum. We give the GVDES the respect we would give any hardworking consultant, but if it does not benefit us in a clear and useful way, we reserve the right not to rehire.

We have also adapted the way we use the materials. After working on GVDES for a while, we were no longer sure we wanted to do all the busywork that took away from our ongoing work and activities. The children do the end-of-chapter assignments but not all the practice sheets, if they feel they already know the material. We use the GVDES to suit our needs. Amber would rather be creating poetry and stories or writing in her journal than following her English Language and Art workbook instructions. Christopher's English Language program is more challenging and creative, however, and as a result he has produced some fine writing inspired by GVDES. ◆

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Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1998 Directory was published in GWS #120.

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Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #126:

MT — Mid-Mountain Home Education Network, PO Box 2182, Montana City Station, Clancy 59634; 406-443-3376; mhen2@juno.com

VT — Ottaquechee Homeschoolers, 1618 Westerdale Rd, Woodstock 05091; Jessica 802-457-1993

Address Changes:

NY — Finger Lakes Unschoolers' Network, 5331 Heverly Rd, Trumansburg 14886; 607-387-3001; triadresearch@juno.com

VT — The Resource Center for Homeschooling, PO Box 55, Fairfax 05454; 802-849-2906

National/General/Special Interest — Jewish Home Educators Network, Lisa Hodge Kander, 2122 Houser, Holly MI 48442; jhen@snj.com

Delete:

CO — Rocky Mtn Education Connection
OR — Willamette Homeschoolers
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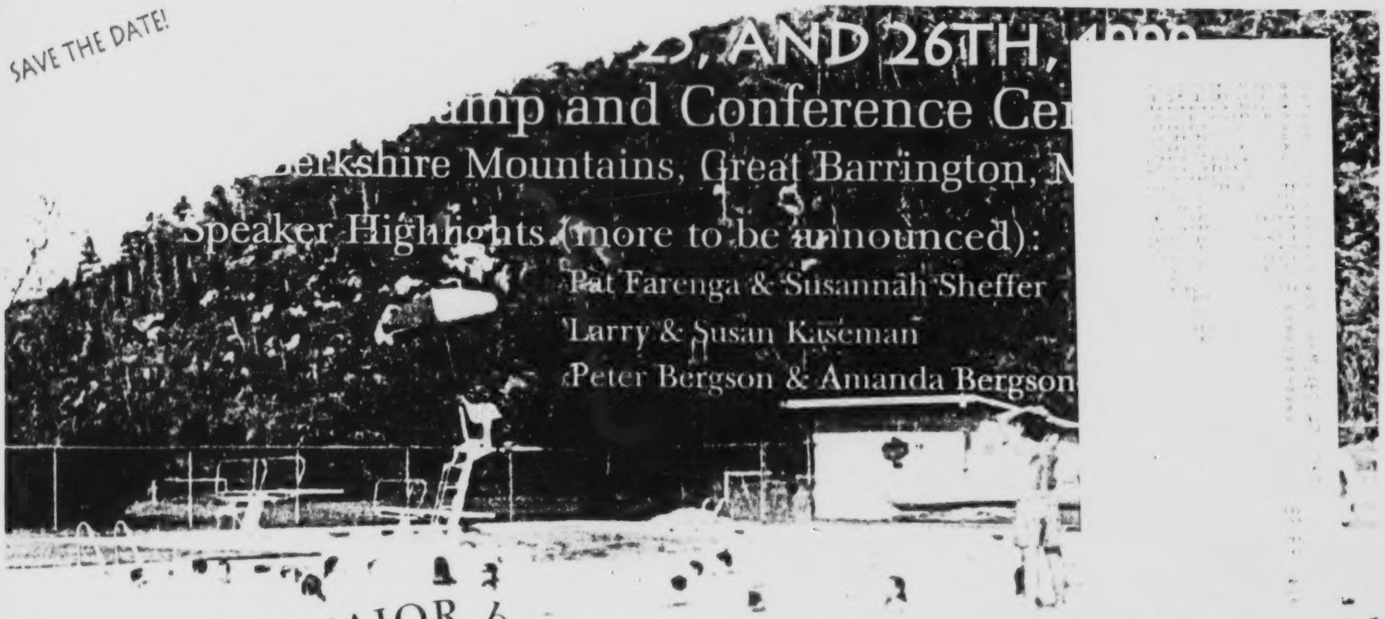

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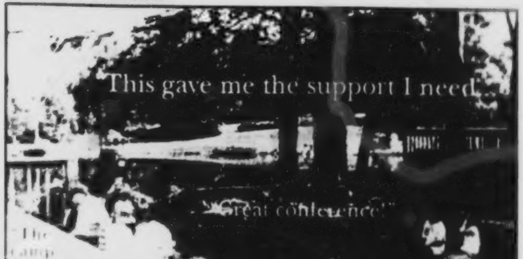

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- THE MISUNDERSTOOD SUBJECT:

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ISSUE #129
JUL./AUG. '99

GWS

FOUNDED IN 1977
BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

A few years ago I was meeting with a girl who had just left school at 15. As she was talking about her interests, she said to me, "One thing that's important to know about me is that I don't like to learn through reading. I'm not good at it; I'm more artistic and theatre-oriented."

Developing self-knowledge is one of the most important parts of homeschooling. Listening to and supporting young people are among the most important things adults can do. So there was a lot of value in the way this girl assessed her inclinations and abilities and dared to tell me about them. There was also value in the fact that I didn't dismiss what she said. I didn't say, "Well, too bad. Reading is important and you'll just have to *learn* to learn that way." Instead we brainstormed some artistic and theatre-based activities she could do.

But the story doesn't end there, because a few months later this girl was reading avidly. Under different circumstances and with a different approach, she found out that she actually could be someone who liked to learn through reading.

What a surprise that was, for her, for me, for her parents. Being open to surprise is probably as important as the other qualities I listed just now. We can't plan for everything; we can't know how new experiences will change our ideas about ourselves and our abilities; we can't predict how one interest will unexpectedly lead to another. Try asking people how they got into whatever is currently grabbing their attention and see how often the answer involves surprise. "I never thought I'd get so interested in French movies, but then I went with a friend who's really into them ...," people say. "I never liked to read history but then I was in a play set in the 19th century and I started to read some stuff so I could understand my character better ... ." One thing leads to another and we find ourselves involved in something we never even thought interested us.

So it's important to pay attention to what interests and excites someone, but it's equally important to remember that such things aren't unchanging. I wouldn't want to fix the idea of a child as a non-reader (or non-mathematical, or whatever) so firmly in my mind that I missed the ways he had changed since I last looked, or so that I failed to mention an opportunity that involved reading because I assumed it wouldn't interest him. "Expecting the unexpected," as the writer Donald Murray puts it, works for adults who are helping kids, it works for adults' own lives, and it works for kids who try new things.

Adults can help make the trying feel safer and easier for kids in a few ways: by making it clear that we're listening and paying attention but we're not clinging to one rigid idea of what the child likes; by allowing the child to try something briefly and then stop if it isn't of interest; by not being so invested in a child's changing his idea about himself that we're tempted to say "I told you so!" when he does surprise himself by liking something new. To make surprises likely and to get the most out of them, openness, for both adult and child, is the key. – Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Don't Link Licenses with Attendance

Over the past few years, several states have proposed legislation that links driver's licenses with high school attendance. As we go to press, such a bill is before the Massachusetts legislature. Below is a letter that a statewide homeschooling group, the Massachusetts Home Learning Association, wrote in opposition to the bill. We print it for the interest of readers in other states who might need to make a similar argument:

We write you in opposition to House Bill 2572, the bill which proposes to deny a driver's license to anyone under the age of 18 who has not "received a high school diploma or is not currently enrolled in a certified high school." The ostensible goal for this plan is to reduce truancy. Yet, under Massachusetts law, once a person reaches the age of 16, that person no longer comes under the reach of the compulsory education statutes; 16 to 18 year olds cannot be truant. We understand that the intent of the bill, nonetheless, is to keep in school those students who are inclined to drop out at age 16.

Let us examine what the effects of such a proposal might be. The suggested remedy for "truancy" represents an unnecessary incentive for the large majority of 16-18 year olds in the Commonwealth; these students already perceive a value in obtaining a high school diploma and are already committed to staying in school to receive it. Would such a remedy, however, be successful in keeping in school those 16-18 year olds who would otherwise leave? The incentive of the driver's license has not demonstrated its supposed motivational power in states that have adopted similar laws; there "is no concrete proof that any of these laws have kept students in school or motivated them to work harder." ("Schools Balk Over Driving Penalties for Students," by David Firestone, *The New York Times*, 3/11/99.)

The proposed remedy will, however, produce pronounced negative side effects on certain categories of teens. Many teens not enrolled in high school at age 16 do not, by any standard, fit the common negative stereotype of "truant." Homeschooled teens in this age category are not enrolled in a "certified high school program," but they pursue a wide variety of productive activities. (It's important to note, furthermore, that the words "certified high school program" have no statutory significance.) College-bound homeschoolers, for example, commonly do not receive high school diplomas but rather are admitted to colleges on the basis of standard (SATs, CLEPs, APs) and non-standard (portfolios, personal interviews) criteria. Some take courses at community colleges or extension schools and need transportation to get to their classes. Some begin apprenticeships. Some pursue their studies at home, preparing for college. These students are in no way "truant." Undoubtedly there are other teens, not homeschooled, who leave school at 16 for perfectly valid and legal reasons. The proposed bill would create genuine harm for mature young people, nearly voting age, who may be getting jobs or entering college early. It seems counterproductive to penalize those who are well on their way to a productive adulthood.

Because H2572 is most likely an ineffective measure and is most certainly an unjust measure, the Massachusetts Home Learning Association is firmly opposed to its passage.

School Sports Access? Legislation and Lawsuit in Michigan

Susan Evans and Ruth Lapeyre write from Michigan:

A class action lawsuit has been introduced in Michigan on behalf of all homeschooled students against all school districts and the Michigan High School Athletic Association. This suit comes on the heels of the introduction of House Bill 4204, which is a bill to allow access to public school sports for homeschoolers and nonpublic school students.

The lawsuit is based on several Michigan Supreme Court decisions dealing with dual enrollment and the guaranteed right of every child in Michigan to have a public school education. Where these "rights" infringe on families and their freedom to provide an education for their children consistent with their values is a future battleground for all homeschoolers.

We see federal ramifications to the lawsuit because it deals with equal application of the law, a Constitutional issue, and the *Snyder v Charlotte* case, on which it draws heavily, approaches the fringes of the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment. We will be nervously watching the course of this lawsuit as it makes its way through the Michigan State and maybe Federal Court systems.

Currently in Michigan, homeschoolers can play on school teams if they enroll in the high school half-time. They can do that by taking a couple of courses at the high school or by enrolling a junior college which allows students to take college classes for high school credit. The latest draft of the sports access bill includes specific regulations applicable to homeschoolers who want to try out for public school teams. These requirements include one or more of the following: annual testing, quarterly evaluations by a certified teacher, comparable grades in community college or university and/or permission from the local school principal. These requirements have not been formerly presented in committee as of this writing, and we don't know if some may be removed or others added. Currently in Michigan homeschoolers have no pre-approval process, no state mandated curricula or testing, no minimum days of instruction, a religious exemption to ANY certified teacher requirement, no entanglement with the state whatsoever. We will be watching closely and will let you know the final form this bill assumes.

It's important to note that school students who want to play on sports teams are subject to all sorts of academic requirements themselves in order to be eligible to play. Homeschoolers have been criticized for wanting to play on school teams, and for wanting to do so without having to go through the same requirements. People say, "These homeschoolers oppose the schools except when *they* want something from them." It seems to us that it's important to understand that this is how some others see the issue.

Many homeschooling families have no interest in access to school sports teams, so they may think that such a law only applies to a small minority of homeschoolers. What follows is a cautionary anecdote for ALL homeschoolers who may think that a law which does not directly affect them is of little or no concern. Catherine Mianecki, President of Michigan Catholic Home-Educators, recently reminded her members the dangerous precedent language can set. We quote here from a letter she recently sent out to members of her group:

> If language establishing requirements for homeschooling students [who want to play school sports] is incorporated into the law, it is likely that the same language will become the basis for extending these requirements to all homeschooled children. The language of existing laws becomes a precedent which legislators often use as a reference or standard when crafting subsequent legislation. Legislators sometimes lift entire passages from an existing law to be included in a new piece of related legislation.
>
> An example of this transfer of language occurred two years ago when the Michigan legislature passed exemption (f) specifically granting homeschooling students exemption from the compulsory attendance law. The language used in exemption (f) was pulled directly from the probate code. It had been placed in the penal code by legislators to "protect" families who were being pursued in the courts for truancy. Because this law had already appeared in one area of the law, however, it was automatically credited with authority by legislators who then readily accepted it as a model when subsequent legislation such as exemption (f) was drawn up. Only because of an outcry from homeschoolers was some of the very restrictive language from the penal code eventually eliminated from exemption (f) before it was passed into law.
>
> If the requirements of testing and oversight by a certified teacher are incorporated into the school code law, as dictated by House Bill 4204, these requirements gain credibility as reasonable legislative expectations. It will be a small step to mandate these requirements for all homeschoolers.

For more information about the lawsuit and the legislation, contact the Michigan Homeschool Association, PO Box 614, Royal Oak, MI 48068

Homeschooling in the News

Nicky Hardenbergh (MA) writes:

I wanted to share a fun story about GWS readers with you. The tale begins with my being interviewed by a *Christian Science Monitor* reporter. She questioned me at length, over the phone, about homeschooling and then asked if my daughter, Sage Cole, would be willing to speak with her. Sage agreed. She, like all long-time homeschoolers, is a veteran at fielding questions about homeschooling. That's what all those years of politely answering pointedly critical questions does for you.

The published article (March 25, "Report Card on Home Schooling in the U.S.") did not quote me, but Sage's comments accounted for two paragraphs of a 19-paragraph story. The remarks the reporter deemed most significant were, of course, about socialization:

> Sage Cole, of Manchester, Mass., has never known anything else: her mother has been her only teacher. The teen doesn't feel she's missing out on the roller-coaster highs and lows associated with high school social scenes. "What I hear [about high school] is mostly negative," Sage says, "and the positive stuff doesn't seem worth it."
>
> She's studying Italian and calculus at home, and English composition via an online class through California's Stanford University. Home learning, she says, lets her practice violin more. And she carves out social time with peers at Boston's New England Conservatory, where she takes instruction.

Sage and I both thought the article was adequate, but we did not deem it a very revealing discussion of the real story of homeschooling. We were very grateful when two excellent, articulate "Readers Write" letters appeared in the *Monitor* several days later. One letter, from 15-year-old Peter Catlin of Rochester, New York, made the crucial point that "it's not absolutely necessary for a student to have an external source of educational guidance." The other letter, from Suzanne Soule of Vista, California, emphasized that "homeschooled children are not being prepared to go out into the world – they are in the world already." As she stated, "It's too bad that the only way homeschooling is justified to some people is through test scores, because to me, the social benefits and real-life learning are the most important reasons to home school."

Both of these letters were much more eloquent and enlightening than the original article. Who were these knowledgeable homeschoolers? On a hunch, I turned to the GWS Directory. After searching through lines of zip codes, we were delighted to find both writers listed. The GWS family is succeeding in bringing the important ideas about homeschooling to the general public. Thank you, Peter and Suzanne!

Office News

Pat Farenga recently returned from England, where he spoke at the Home Education Conference1999. He writes, "About 300 attendees convened for two days of lectures and workshops. It reminded me of the informal, more intimate homeschooling conferences of the mid-to-late '80s in the U.S. The similarities to U.S. homeschooling were also striking as the audience questioned various presenters: Should we cooperate with researchers? Should we demand access to school activities funded by our taxes? Should we stand up and publicly lobby for homeschooling or quietly keep building our strength and speak out on an as-needed basis? No easy answers to these questions, as we Americans are still struggling with them, but it was exciting to hear the questions phrased and analyzed from different points of view than I'm accustomed to hearing.

"While the national curriculum of the UK hasn't affected homeschooling in a totally negative way – apparently there is a lot of wriggle-room for alternative learning and parenting approaches – there is a development that I think likely to happen here in the U.S.: the conflation of the bureaucracies of education and labor. The DfEE, Dept. for Education and Employment, is the primary bureaucratic authority that homeschoolers contend with in England, and I suspect it is only a matter of time before we see our own government decide to tie education to employment as well. As School-to-Work certification initiatives keep appearing in U.S. state and federal legislatures, we need to be wary. It's not clear that such links have helped Britain contend with their economic and unemployment problems, but the main logic for implementing these programs here is that European countries have them."

In other news, we welcome two new staff members: conference coordinator Sophia Savigh, a homeschooling mother who has organized an active local support group and many La Leche League events, and office administrator Adoni Olenja, who grew up in Kenya and comes to us with a strong interest (and a long career) in education, including several years as a homeschooling father in the 1980s. ◆

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Math: The Most Misunderstood Subject

Not just worksheets and textbooks! Not just for the mathematically minded! Here are some stories about very different kinds of math.

Organizing a Math Fair

David Mantell (NY) writes:

After our local homeschooling group's science and history fairs, I finally got the chance to organize a math fair for our April 1998 meeting. I hadn't expected as many participants; math just isn't as popular with the homeschooling masses as science and history are. Our daughter, for example, chose not to participate as an exhibitor, though she did enjoy browsing through the fair's displays. In the end, we had a lot of wonderful projects, fewer than in the previous fairs but more varied and interesting than I had imagined: Fibonacci Numbers and the Golden Ratio, Slide Rules, Roman Numerals, Hexaflexigons, Math in Art: Scale and Proportion (see the article by Alison and Heather Nihart, below), and Everyday Math (one family produced a pamphlet complete with photos and examples of ways they naturally use math in their home).

Our 12-year-old son Eli chose Drum Math for his topic. A few months before, for a science project, I had brought home a strobe light and an oscilloscope from work. We had hooked up the microphone to the oscilloscope to see the frequencies produced by Eli's djembe (an African-style hand drum). We had used the strobe light to observe the vibration of the drum head in slow motion.

To transform this from a science to a math project, we used the program Excel to make a few explanatory graphs on our computer. One showed the difference between loud and soft sounds: the frequency remains the same but the amplitude is increased. This was demonstrated convincingly on the oscilloscope by hitting the drum forcefully and gently. Another graph showed the difference between high and low frequency sounds. He demonstrated the low frequency, long wavelength trace on the scope by hitting the drum in the middle (the base note) and the high frequency, short wavelength trace by hitting the drum near the rim (the tin note).

A third graph demonstrated how a strobe light can capture a rapid motion and make it appear slow. This one was my contribution. Eventually Eli understood what I meant by the graph and during the fair confidently referred to it to explain how the strobe worked. Another of my additions, the last graph showed the pattern derived from the sum of nearby sine waves. I had hoped that it would help him understand that the drum does not produce a pure frequency, but a mix of them. This also has a profound effect on the trace we see in the oscilloscope and, more importantly, on the sound we hear. He didn't really get it at the time, but included it on his poster anyway.

Eli's project and the whole fair came off splendidly. We had to set up in a separate room so that we could turn off the lights for the strobe. This was also a good idea because the drum is pretty loud. In the end, Eli needed quite a bit of help running all the equipment. I didn't need to do much of the talking, though. He joyfully explained how drums work to a steady stream of curious homeschoolers, showing the patterns in the oscilloscope and illuminating the vibration in slow motion with the strobe. Perhaps his favorite part, though, was that he got to show off his drumming. Quite a few of the younger kids sat mesmerized as Eli played his favorite rhythms for them. I wouldn't be surprised if we see some of them in a future homeschooling drumming circle.

Math in Art

Alison and Heather Nihart of New York write:

When we found out that our local homeschooling group was going to hold a Math Fair last year (when we were 13 and 10), there was the usual discussion at our house that takes place when project fairs come up: what could we do? how could we make it interesting? We eventually decided to explain how our dad uses math in his artwork and his profession. Our project was titled *Math in Art: Scale and Proportion.*

Our dad, John, designs trade show exhibits as his full-time job. However, Dad is by choice an artist in his free time. His sculptures have been featured in galleries in our city and other cities and his artwork is a large part of our lives, especially in the warm months when he can work outside in our backyard. One of our earliest memories is watching him work at the kitchen table using polystyrene plastic to make small scale models, called maquettes, for his sculptures. When he was through, the two of us would make our own sculptures from the scrap pieces. Our dad usually makes a maquette of a sculpture he plans to build and from that he can scale it up to any size he desires. He does this by first measuring the parts of the maquette, then multiplying each dimension by a calculated percentage to determine the finished sculpture's size and proportions. In our Math Fair display, we showed four different-sized versions of one sculpture, ranging from the original 3-inch maquette to a photo of a 6-foot outdoor piece, along with an explanation of how to scale up using this method.

Another technique of scaling that we included was how to use a grid to enlarge drawings and sculpture pieces. One time Dad used this technique when he was commissioned to make a 13-foot gecko lizard. He drew a grid with 1-inch squares over the original drawings of the lizard. Then he drew a grid with 1-foot squares on a 13-foot piece of brown paper and redrew the drawing onto the larger squares by working one square at a time. This was accomplished on our living room floor and we both helped him by comparing the shape of the line in each square to the original drawing. In our Math Fair project, we demonstrated this technique with a drawing of a butterfly on a 1-inch grid. We supplied paper with 2-inch grids so that people could try to enlarge the drawing themselves.

Our dad's job as a designer requires a lot of computer time an even though the computer can do a lot of the math for him it is still, as always, a tool. To demonstrate the techniques he uses for scaling drawings, we displayed a blueprint of a floor plan that was drawn to scale (i.e. 1/4 inch = 1 foot) and provided an architectural scale ruler, so that people could measure distances on the blueprint. The blueprint was 30 x 40 inches and the finished exhibit was 60 x 100 feet. We displayed a photograph of the finished exhibit, to show the design in its 3-dimensional form.

We have both always been interested in our dad's job and how he comes up with the ideas and designs for an exhibit, and we enjoy his willingness to share with us exactly what he does to earn a living. We are often involved in dinnertime discussions concerning new ideas and esthetics of designs, both in his artwork and in his exhibits. We have seen how Dad works through a design process and sometimes when he works at home we color in – with his special markers – the extra drawings of exhibit designs that he does not need.

We think that this Math Fair project was especially interesting, because we have always been involved in our dad's art and design profession and we understand it enough for us to do a project about it. As we worked on the project, we realized that our being included in Dad's work was something we always took for granted and that it is really special that he has been able to share this part of his life with us. We are glad that this experience has been a part of our lives.

In the Real World: Wondering, Thinking, Talking

Lynette Culverhouse of Massachusetts writes:

I have specialized in math learning for over 25 years. Many of those years were in a classroom setting, but over the last few years I have worked with homeschoolers and adults as well as children who go to school. One of the major differences I have observed

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between children who are home learners and those of us who are schooled (both young and adult) is that when presented with a problem, home learners immediately assume responsibility for thinking about a solution and testing their assumptions, whereas everyone else will look for instructions and guidance at each stage. For example, I use a game called chip trading. It is played in different bases. In the basic game using base 4, two dice are thrown and that number of yellow chips are placed on a till (a little piece of wood with four nails on it. The chips have holes in the middle and fit over the nails). Every four yellows are traded for a blue chip. Every four blues are traded for a green and every four greens for a red. This process can be reversed starting with a red and taking them away instead of adding on. It can also be played in any other number base. The game is a way of seeing and feeling the concept of bases. There are many ways of mentally calculating how many chips of each color will be left at the end of each turn. Homeschoolers seem to enjoy and take charge of the process they go through as they learn this game, whereas children who are schooled, in my observation, want to be shown a process. Many of them have already lost the ability to trust their own thinking and to find their own problem-solving strategies. In my experience, if children are shown a process for solving number problems, they will stop thinking about finding their own solutions and will soon forget that they ever could. The method becomes more important than the thinking.

I have run workshops for parents where I introduce them to some of the activities that I do with children. It is clear that those of us who come from rigid learning backgrounds have a very hard time visualizing mathematical processes. I've seen adults struggle with what for 6-year-olds comes naturally. When children are allowed to develop their own problem-solving strategies by using materials and doing mental experiments with numbers, they can develop a very high level of numeracy.

I had some 10-year-olds ask me to help them with long multiplication. They had been told by their teacher they had to solve the problems using the traditional method. Having this method fixed in their minds stopped them from being able to think about what it means, which left them feeling completely powerless. Once I could convince them to let go of the method, they were able to come up with all kinds of strategies for finding the solutions and were visibly elated at arriving at the point of understanding. It is the understanding that is empowering, not the memorization of methods.

I believe that math learning is particularly important for girls. Much recent research has shown that girls by sixth grade lose confidence in their own intelligence and start using language like "I dunno" or "kinda" or "sort of." It is clear that when they say they don't know it doesn't mean that they don't know; rather it means that they don't trust their own thinking enough to make a statement about it, whatever it is. Challenging girls to explore math is a reminder to them that they are intelligent and can think very well. When a concept is understood, you cannot deny the worth of the thinking that led to the understanding. It is very clear. You either understand or you don't, and if you don't you can keep pursuing it until you do.

I have always specialized in elementary math. Recently, however, I began a class with 12- and 13-year-old homeschoolers. I have loved this. It has challenged my own thinking as I have to reach my own place of understanding before I can effectively pass that on. Sometimes I feel that I am in the class learning alongside them and experiencing the same thrill when I "get it." It is good for kids to see adults enjoy their own process and take pleasure in their own intellectual pursuits. It tells them that we are all on this learning journey together and that it is a journey that never ends.

Math learning goes on all the time in everyday life. Every time you have a "how many?", "how big?", or "how far?" question you are "doing math." I had two children sitting at my table recently, each with a different sized glass, and one can of soda. Then came the question of how to divide it evenly and which glass held more. An essential stage to this process is the guessing stage. Now it may well be that there is a formula for calculating this but giving them that formula would not be math; it would be memorizing a formula. The math happens when children are able to take the time to visually absorb dimensions and data so that the shapes and sizes of things become visually fixed in their minds; thus when the time comes for mathematical formulae they will make sense.

One of our favorite activities in our family is to fantasize having an amount of money, say $100, to spend, and then have the kids go catalog shopping. They can choose one or more catalogs and go to town. They have to factor in tax and shipping costs. And when we go grocery shopping, we each estimate how much we think the groceries will total before the check out. We have also done a lot of math in the car. We play a game where we have to add the digits on car registrations and try to find the highest total. You have to be very fast because cars go by fast, so you have to develop some strategies for fast addition. My daughter looks for pairs of numbers that add up to ten, my son adds the bigger numbers first; everyone will find their most efficient method.

When I learned math in school I was limited to one method, the one that I was shown. By watching and listening to kids I have discovered there are many different strategies for solving even the most basic computation problems. Some people do not memorize math facts well and need to be able to develop their own strategies. I was never able to memorize all the multiplication facts and to this day use my strategies for some of them; for example, for 8 x 7 I do 7 x 7 and add 7; someone else may remember 4 x 7 is 28 and double it; someone else may do 10 x 7 less 2 x 7, and someone else may count in 7's 8 times. It is important both for kids to talk about their problem-solving thinking and for adults to be interested and in awe of it. Math is like an evolving puzzle that allows you to keep discovering new ways to piece it together.

Every time a child wonders how much an elephant weighs or how far away the moon is, they are thinking mathematically. Whenever a question like this is asked, I always turn it back to them by asking them what they think. How can people find out how far away the moon is? We don't even need to answer the question because the object is to encourage the thinking. This question could be followed by how far away is the sun or the stars. Then we move into very large numbers and what that means. If they are that far away, how do we even get to see them? When kids ask questions, they are rarely looking for our answers. They have usually already figured out what they think and need an arena to try out their ideas. We only need to listen and encourage more questions.

Homeschoolers have much more access to materials and resources for meaningful mathematical experiences than school learners because real math happens in the world. It is these real-life experiences that really build our understanding of math. So if you are having conversations with your children, playing with them, encouraging their curiosity and taking them out into the world, they are getting more math than you probably realize.

Solving the Problem Her Own Way

Kennard Wing of Pennsylvania writes:

Several months ago, I was making breakfast for my kids when 7-year-old Sara came over and showed me a small toy she had been given by a neighbor. It was a blob of plastic shaped vaguely like a head, whose only feature was a mouth. It was so crude it made the toys McDonald's gives away look like works of art. She announced that these toys cost "only" $1.50 for four. To me, they looked like they were turned out in China by the millions for about a tenth of a cent apiece.

Then Sara said, "You play a game with them. Each person needs six to play."

What a dishonest way to exploit children, I thought: packaging these toys in groups of four to keep the apparent price down, but actually requiring six per child.

"All right," I said. "I've got a math problem for you. How much money would you need to buy enough of these toys for four people to play the game?"

Now, I knew Sara didn't know either multiplication or division. I also knew that *I* couldn't solve the problem without them. But I wanted to make a point about the real price of these toys.

Sara got out paper and pencil and got to work, and I went back to the kitchen. I no longer remember how long she took – maybe about five minutes.

"$9.00," she said.

"Right," I said. "How did you get your answer?"

She showed me her paper. It looked something like this:

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Looking at the paper, I couldn't see how Sara had solved the problem. I asked her to explain it to me.

She said, "I started with one package, and wrote down $1.50 and 4 pieces. I didn't have enough pieces for even one person, so I put down a second package. Now I had enough for the first player, so I wrote a 6 down here, and 2 left over. I put down another package, and then I had 6 for the second person, so I wrote the next 6 down here. The next package only gave me 4 toward the third person so I put down another package. Now I had enough for the third person and two left over, so I wrote down the third 6. I put down another package, and with the two left over, I had 6 pieces for the fourth player, so I wrote down the last 6. Then I went back and added up all the $1.50s, and got $9.00."

I was blown away. She had *invented* a method for solving the problem, without using either multiplication or division! For the moment, though, I didn't want to lose track of my other purpose in posing this problem.

I said, "So tell me, Sara. For what you need to play that game, and what you get for your money, is that a little bit of money, or is that a lot of money?"

"It's too much money," she said.

"So has solving this problem changed your mind about this toy?" I asked.

"Yes. It's a rip-off."

Then we talked about her solution (and how amazing she was). I pointed out that her solution was very much how you would program a computer to solve the problem. We talked about how she kept looping back to "buy" another package until she had enough pieces. When I took programming back in college, a great many students had real difficulty thinking this way. It was "unnatural" to them. Yet here was Sara, age 7. What else could this be but her natural way of thinking?

I know that if Sara were in school, she would never have been given this problem, because it is not "age-appropriate" and she doesn't have the needed "math skills" and "math facts" yet. Giving her the problem could only guarantee failure and "damage her self-esteem," right? Wrong. We have little idea what our kids are really capable of, and we need to make sure that our idea of their capabilities doesn't hold them back.

There is a postscript to this story. All three of my children were present when Sara solved the problem. In the intervening months, none has asked for these toys to be purchased for them. Neither have the children purchased them themselves. On two occasions, Sara has brought up these toys, saying what a rip-off they are.

Reconsidering Algebra

We asked Josh Rappaport, author of *The Algebra Survival Kit*, to answer some questions about algebra:

Why did you decide to create this book?

In 1990 I started advertising my services as a tutor. I said I was open to tutoring just about anything, K-12, and of the calls I got, about 75% wanted help with math and about 40% of those were about algebra. I was seeing all these kids parading through my office asking for help, and I said to myself, "There's something going on here. Kids are just not getting this as it's now being taught." In working with kids, I developed metaphors and analogies for algebraic thought, and I put them on flash cards. One 15-year-old girl suggested I make a book out of those cards, and that's how I decided to create the book.

I saw kids memorizing rules, following steps blindly, but they had no understanding of what they were doing. So I would think of metaphors and analogies that would help them. I found that with these ways of thinking about it, even kids who had the most trouble with math could grasp the concepts. I thought, if it's possible to create these metaphors, why aren't the textbooks doing it? There's very little in textbooks that engages kids' imaginations. I think one reason for that is that textbooks have been written by people with PhDs who understand the material already and who have very little connection with the kids who will be reading them. That is changing somewhat now, though, as teachers are getting more involved in writing textbooks.

A lot of kids wonder, "Is algebra really necessary? What do I need to know this for?"

I like to turn the question around and say: how often do you need to know about photosynthesis? Algebra isn't essential, but I don't think we should limit ourselves to learning what's essential. Algebra is interesting; it's something that's been discovered. Why not learn about it just as you might learn anything that people have figured out? Algebra is part of who we are. The Pythagorean Theorem has always been true – it was true before there were human beings – but human beings now understand some of these truths that were already there, that were part of our universe. These things are part of our perceptions so they're really a part of us. The way I see it is that just as psychoanalysis, for example, is about understanding ourselves, so is doing math a way of understanding our own minds.

I'll put it in terms of mystery. Our dreams are mysterious to us, why we say the things we do often mystifies us – in general, who we are is mysterious; it unfolds over time. In the same way, if you look at math, there are all kinds of mysteries in math, things that have never been discovered. Three hundred and fifty years ago, the French mathematician Fermat had a theorem that was based on the Pythagorean Theorem but at a higher level. A question had been posed and people were trying to figure out whether or not it was true. He believed it was and he created a theorem to prove it, but what he wrote was that he came up with a beautiful proof but the margin of the text was too small to write it in. And then he died! So for 350 years people were trying to come up with the proof. Finally in 1993 a British mathematician cracked it. That kind of thing is so exciting. There was a time before the number 0 was recognized as a number. There was a time before negative numbers were accepted. It was an act of imagination to assert these things. And now there are mysteries about prime numbers. We know that there are consecutive primes – two that are right next to each other, like 11 and 13, and 17 and 19. It's been theorized that there are an infinite number of consecutive primes, but no one has ever been able to prove that that's true. That question is out there, and so are many other questions. I think it's really a crime that kids are robbed of the sense that there are mysteries in math. When I was a student, I thought I was just learning all this stuff that everyone had learned before me. But when you realize that there is mystery, math becomes so alive.

What about specific pursuits or types of work? Are there some for which algebra is truly necessary?

Well, it's true that most people don't go around factoring trinomials in daily life. I do think that algebra helps build abstract thinking skills in general; it can help us think about politics, religion, philosophy, or anything else. But I think algebra is also like any tool. If you have to go someplace that's 75 miles away, and you have 40 minutes to get there, if you know that rate x time = distance, that gives you a tool you can use to figure out how fast you need to travel. And there are fields that use some algebra: architecture, for example, or engineering. My father is an engineer and he just sent me a book saying that when it comes to figuring out how much stress bridges can bear, or highway construction, or building high rises, all of that work uses equations with variables and radicals and exponents.

I do think, though, that math is asked to defend itself more than any other subject. People say "Why is this necessary" and I think that's because people have so much trouble with math. I try to help kids see that it doesn't have to be as hard as it seems, and I try to connect it to their creative and intuitive side. At a homeschooling conference, I'll be leading a workshop called "From Poetry to Polynomials," about how you can do creative writing that involves math. You could write a story like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for example, but instead of coming into Narnia, you could go through a wardrobe and come out in a land where there were only negative numbers.

What would you change about the way math is usually taught?

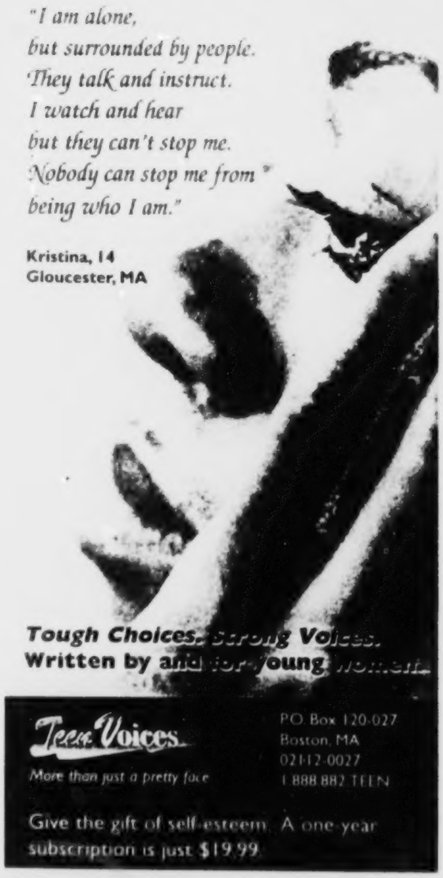
I try to give kids more power when they're doing math. If I'm working with a student who has just struggled with a couple of problems, I say, "How about if you make a problem for me?" A lot of us have math anxiety because we felt that we could never get to the point of making problems.

I'm in the process of applying for a grant to create a new algebra curriculum. It uses a three-pronged approach. One part is to use the standards that have been put out by the National Standards of the Teachers of Math, because these standards are actually very creative – for example, they talk about math as communication, and they try to make a bridge between math and writing by, for example, having an open-ended problem and then asking the student, "Describe what you thought when you heard the problem, what went through your mind, what strategies you used."

Another part is to bring in right-brained, wild, creative math, which could involve doing creative writing, as I said, and doing art, perhaps making connections between art and geometry, and getting into the mysteries of it, as I also said earlier.

The third part is to reach out to kids who learn math in all different ways. Some may be more visual, some more kinesthetic, some more auditory.

The Algebra Survival Kit is available from John Holt's Bookstore (see p. 28 for information about that book and our other books that can help you see math in new ways). Josh Rappaport also has an online newsletter with math ideas and suggestions, available at www.mathkits.com ◆



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Challenges & Concerns

Late Socializer

Ginger Fitzsimmons (MA) writes:

Whenever the "But what about socialization?" question came up, for the past few years I would talk about the ways my daughter socialized outside of school. I've been silent about my son, who quit Scouting after first grade, dropped out of Sunday School about a year before that, hated homeschool group activities, and literally would stay in the house for more than a week at a time. My husband and I would occasionally insist that he go to the supermarket with us or go for a walk, just to reassure ourselves that he *could* leave the house and that this wasn't a phobia that we had to deal with somehow.

It seems that he wasn't in fact afraid of leaving the house; he just didn't see any reason to go out. He had parents and a sister to talk to, he had the computer and the television and books and people who were willing to go out and bring him food and library books. He would go out to occasional parties or events with the family if asked, but he rarely seemed to think of going out by himself. He seemed to me to be a classic example of what the "S-word" people were afraid of.

I might point out that my son has almost always gotten along well with adults, but his success with kids has been mixed, at best. So few shared his interests or seemed willing to conduct themselves like people instead of children that he talked more to adults when he was out in the world. His age-mates were not his peers. He had mastered social behavior in the adult world, he just didn't seem to have much of a social life.

Something has happened in the last year or so, mostly since he turned 16. He now goes to a juggling club on Sunday afternoons, role-playing games or singing group Monday nights, Society for Creative Anachronism dance practice Wednesday nights, and sometimes improv theater practice on Tuesday nights. He just finished light design for a local homeschool theater group and is now learning to be a master electrician for a college Gilbert and Sullivan group. He gets invited to parties and extended role-playing games and he goes, even when it means staying the night on somebody's couch. Very little of this is my idea, though I provide transportation and monetary assistance and am (usually) willing to listen to him talk through whatever is going on in his life. I have gone from worrying that he had no social life to worrying about where he is and what he is doing in his new social life.

How did this change happen? My best guess is that he finally grew enough physically that the people he wanted to socialize with started taking him seriously. People stopped treating him like a child. I think he may have been ready earlier than he actually blossomed, but the world wasn't ready for him. The juggling club was in some ways a turning point, I think; this was something he wanted to get better at that he couldn't get at home. When he went to hang out with other jugglers, they accepted him right away, without any fuss. The next group, and the next, were easier.

I have read about late readers for a number of years now. I thought some people might be interested to know that there is at least one homeschooling "late socializer" out here, and he seems to be doing fine.

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Homeschooling a Deaf Child

From Marilyn Agenbroad, coordinator of the Deaf Homeschool Network:

I have four children, all of whom were adopted internationally, and my 8-year-old son is deaf. When my kids were preschoolers, I was already beginning to feel that I wanted to homeschool. My husband, however, felt that we couldn't homeschool a deaf child. He had worked in a school for the deaf and had gotten his master's in rehabilitation counseling, and all his training said that a deaf child has to be socialized and educated with other deaf children. I didn't fight about it, so our son went to school, starting at age 2.

Then, just before my son went to kindergarten, my husband and I went to a homeschooling conference. We each went to different sessions throughout the day, and when we met for dinner that evening, my husband said, "I don't see why we shouldn't homeschool all our kids." I said, "Great!" We planned to work into it gradually. For his kindergarten year, our plan had been that he would go to a class for deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the morning and then be mainstreamed into a regular class in the afternoon, with an interpreter. We decided that he would go to the deaf kindergarten in the morning and then come home for the afternoon. Then the following year, in first grade, he stayed home full time.

My son is profoundly deaf; he doesn't have understandable speech and relies solely on sign language. For many parents of deaf children, the primary concern is language development. If sign language is a second language for you and you're trying to teach your child to be fluent in it, that can be hard. My husband had learned to sign when he worked at the deaf school, but he was rusty at it, and I had also tried to learn to sign years ago when a friend of mine had a deaf son. But I found out what a challenge it is to learn a second language, and it didn't work too well for me at that time. Later, when we decided to adopt Louis, we had to wait a year before we could bring him home and during that time I took sign language classes at night, to prepare. This time, of course, my motivation was extremely high – I was doing it for my son. I still say that I'll be learning sign language for the rest of my life. Meanwhile, my other children learned sign language easily, and that's a wonderful benefit for Louis. I don't have great fears about his language ability because he has always been a great communicator. Whenever we get together with other deaf people, they're just awed at his skill; they always say, "Where did he learn to sign?" Although he is learning from us, he can sign better than we can, because it comes naturally to him. He does get exposure to others: at church we have a skilled interpreter, and there are other ways to bring models other than yourself into the home - there are videos with stories in sign language, for example.

It's true that socialization can be a bigger issue with a deaf child, because the range of possible playmates is more limited. Not everyone is willing to play with a child that they can't communicate with, and some deaf children are really taken advantage of. But although those are definite concerns, my son has friends in our town who have hearing loss and who sign with him. We do occasionally visit his old school or visit the state school for the deaf, and Louis never expresses a wish to go there. That might change when he gets older, but right now he's happy being homeschooled. We're allowed to participate in classes and activities at the deaf school – we just went to a science fair there, for example – so if Louis decided that he wanted to join a sports team at the school, or to join one of the social clubs that happen after class time, those would be available to him.

In the Deaf Homeschool Network, the families are scattered geographically, but we help each other feel less isolated. I put out a membership directory that gives background information on each family so that people can contact each other. We have a couple of parents right now who are being challenged in their right to homeschool, specifically because of the deafness of their child, and they're trying to look to our network to show that other families *are* homeschooling deaf children successfully.

In general, not as many deaf people know about homeschooling as a possible option, and I have had some friends with deaf children who felt strongly that they should be in school. Some of this has to do with history. For a long time, deaf children were told that they couldn't use their hands, that they had to be oral, and they were treated very cruelly if they did try to sign. So a lot of children missed out on a great deal of what was going on. And the tradition of sending deaf children off to residential schools meant that many were not a part of their own family lives. When deaf schools finally began accepting sign language, it made a world of difference for deaf children. Life opened

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up: they could finally communicate in their natural language. Many people within the deaf community feel that they've come so far, finally being educated and socializing in their own language and finally having deaf role models, so why would anyone want to take that away from a child?

As I've said, we have enough resources here and enough access to the deaf community that homeschooling works well for us. And something interesting happened this past Christmas, when we were traveling and went to a church that had an interpreter. We talked with the other deaf people there and they were impressed with my son and asked what school he went to. I said he was homeschooling, and one of the deaf women said, "Oh, that's so neat. I have some friends who homeschool."

For information about the Deaf Homeschool Network, write Marilyn Agenbroad, 116 Jerome, Silverton OR 97381; phone 503-873-8451; email agie@ncn.com. The newsletter is $6 year and a year's worth of back issues are available for $4. The Network is for *hearing* parents homeschooling deaf children. We also received an announcement about a newsletter for deaf parents who homeschool hearing children: Deaf Moms Homeschooling Newsletter, c/o Vanessa Kramer, 602 S West St, Carlinville IL 62626-2110.

Homeschooler Critiques College

At the University of Pennsylvania this spring, grown homeschooler Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (PA) wrote a weekly column for the university's newspaper The Daily Pennsylvanian, *in which she discussed such topics as homeschooling, the grading system, what's wrong with required reading, and the problem of age segregation. We excerpt from some of these columns below. We would be interested to hear about other ways in which homeschoolers share their special perspective outside of homeschooling circles.*

From the column, "A timely goodbye to the first school I ever attended":

Graduation is looming. All around me I hear seniors joking uneasily about being thrust out into the "real world." I smile, but I can't really empathize.

For me, college was an interlude, the only formal schooling I've ever known. Far from clinging to the cocoon of Penn, I'm acting on Mark Twain's famous admonition to "never let schooling interfere with your education." Wonderful as Penn has been, it is intruding on my education. It's time for me to go.

I don't feel as if I'm just now moving into the real world, because I grew up there – I was homeschooled.

[Amanda gives a basic explanation of homeschooling and then continues:]

In a way, it was great to come to college. I was no longer too young to be out on a weekday and for the first time nobody questioned whether I fit in. I'd spent the first 17 years of my life talking about homeschooling and now it only came up as the answer to a direct question.

At college, whether or not I brought it up was more of a game I played. If I didn't say anything, I could "pass." My background could be my secret and I could make an argument in class without having to worry that people would judge all homeschoolers by me.

I felt like an undercover agent. School wasn't part of my history; I hadn't even been certain I wanted to go to college. Once here, I found fascinating teachers and inspiring classes, interesting students and a whole new urban landscape. But I also felt bombarded by school priorities and paradigms. Grades, tests, required reading, diplomas – I didn't prize these things and I resented their encroachment on my learning experience.

I'll graduate from Penn in a few short months and I still feel the ten-

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sion between the values of my childhood and those of mainstream school culture. College for me was less about getting a degree than choosing things to learn about but all around me people were looking at the finish line. It scares me that sometimes I know how they feel, that sometimes I rationalize to myself that grades are really kind of useful.

People ask me if I'm going to grad school and usually I laugh and make a comment about money. But it's not really about that.

I don't want to go to grad school because as much as I've grown and flourished at Penn, I've also started to absorb the traditional thinking about how and when learning happens. The longer I stay here, the easier it is to give up and go with the flow. To accept that it's not the learning that matters, it's the grade; it's not the people that matter, it's the piece of paper.

And that's why I'm ready to leave.

From the column, "Grades cause problems, get in way of learning":

... I was educated without grades for the first 17 years of my life, so I'm in the unusual position of having experienced life both with and without them. And I've come to the conclusion that grades are the single biggest impediment to learning.

Contrary to popular wisdom, grades do not motivate people to learn. They motivate people to get good grades. The point of getting a D on a test is not to help you learn the material, it is to nudge and humiliate you into getting a B on your next text.

Grades poison the teacher-student relationship. One of the first things I learned in college is that any-thing that smacks of enthusiasm is likely to be called grade-grubbing. Now I reconsider every time I want to bring an article to class, send a post to the listserv or even refer to the readings. Especially in lecture classes – where intimacy is lacking – these actions are frequently regarded as teacher-pleasing. And why would you want to please a teacher, if not for a better grade?

Grades waste class time. I have spent hours listening to droning about the curve, the distribution, and on and on. Bad enough that we grade – do we have to discuss the logistics to death?

Good grades have little usefulness in the adult world. The customers I deal with every day don't care if I got an A in Business Writing; they want to be able to understand the letters I send them. My boss is less concerned with my test score in Thinking and Decision Making than with how I actually make decisions.

Well, so what? Tests are supposed to measure what you've learned. Chances are, my ability to communicate with a Cuban customer is reflected in my Spanish grade.

Or maybe not. Regardless of what they're supposed to do, how well tests actually measure learning is another matter. How many of us have crammed, regurgitated, and promptly moved on? In almost any course, someone with a decent grasp of the subject matter might get a good grade.

But it's quite likely that some students with a superficial and/or transitory understanding will also push the right buttons to come out with an A. Some people consider it a point of pride to be able to write a successful paper without reading the book they're referencing.

Grades contaminate relationships between students. Particularly in situations of artificial scarcity or curves, there are actual incentives to not work together. If only three students will get A's, my helping you might backfire if you beat me out for one of those spots. Or putting in extra study time together might mean that we'd shift the curve and earn the enmity of our classmates. This doesn't build great teamwork patterns for our adult lives.

Finally, grades are self-reinforcing; their constant use dupes people into believing they're an important and helpful tool. This is reflected in statements such as "You have to have a 3.5 to get into this grad school" or "XYZ big company will hire only people with a GPA of 4.0." ... ◆

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Learning Surprises

Learning isn't all about planning. Sometimes life surprises us: one thing leads to another, and we become interested in something that hadn't interested us before. Here, young people write about how they surprised themselves and discovered a new interest.

Just Going Along for the Ride?

From Michael Sotak (MA):

About five years ago, I went with my mom to help at our town's big recycling/hazardous waste collection day. The lady who ran the thing said that I could work in the newspaper recycling section. I ended up staying there all day because it was so much fun.

Afterwards, I started thinking more about recycling and noticing stuff along the streets and highways that had just been dumped. I kept volunteering for the Earth Day collection days, even on days that my mom didn't work. I kept working in the newspaper section because the adults were so worried about me getting hurt because I was so young. I really wanted to work in the scrap metal area.

I made signs for advertising the collection days and cleaned areas around town. I rode my bike all over the place and took note of areas where people had dumped stuff illegally. I would tell the head of the recycling committee about these places and she would get work groups like Scouts to clean them up.

Finally, when I was 10, the lady in charge assigned me to the scrap metal section. It was great! All last year I got my mom to go out on "Earth Day runs," as I call them. I started to collect all the heavy metal stuff I found along the roads, to be sure they could get recycled properly. My parents let me create this giant junkyard in our own backyard, holding these things 'til the next Earth Day collection. It was huge: mainly mufflers, hub caps, a rusty engine, pipes, chicken wire, a few discarded tires. On Earth Day, we brought two full loads of metal to the recycling day. The pipes were taken by scrap metal dealers and the remainder of the metal went to be melted down and reused.

Now that I am 11, I am a member of the recycling committee in my town and I continue going on Earth Day runs. This all began when I thought I was just going along to hang out with my mom and get free soda for volunteering. But because I went that first time, I found that I was real interested in recycling, especially the big junk that often doesn't get cleaned up.

Never Thought About Model Airplanes ...

From Victoria Church (CT):

I never thought I'd like to build model ariplanes. In fact, I never thought about them at all. But after I met the new boy in the neighborhood and saw the model airplanes he had been building since he was 5 (he was 13 when we met him), I thought that I would definitely enjoy learning how. I enjoy art and creating detailed things with my hands.

Once I started my first airplane, everything was quiet. (My sister and our friend were working on their own.) I am not one to sit without talking for a long time, and after a while it seemed boring. I thought maybe I wouldn't like modeling after all. But as I worked further, I saw the way everything fit together logically and I realized that it was fun.

My first plane was a World War II Dauntless. Since then I have built a Curtis P-36 and the Memphis Belle. Sometimes it can be very frustrating and hard when nothing seems to fit, but now I know I love it. I love the tiny details and the way the planes look when they're done, and I will keep making them.

From One Film to a Passionate Interest

From Amber Rose Weller (RI):

It's amazing sometimes how one small interest can lead you to many new experiences you never thought, in a million years, you would give the slightest concern.

Ever since I was a young child, I have had an interest in animation. About three years ago, my interest took an unexpected turn when my cousin introduced me to Japanese animation. Immediately, I was drawn to this unique and compelling art form. What amazed me was the complexity of the storylines and the fact that it was animation intended for older audiences. After watching that one film, I became a serious collector of the art form. But the real significance of my encounter with Japanese animation goes way beyond the vast number of videos that now overpopulate my closet.

My interest led me to learn how to use the internet better to find news about the industry and learn about the growing interest in Japanese animation in America. The desire to connect with others who shared this interest led me to form my own Japanese animation discussion group. We have met every month for a year now and our numbers have steadily increased so that we are outgrowing our corner of the bookstore where we meet. Right now it is our first-year anniversary and we are planning a website for the group.

My interest has also led me to travel more. Last August I went to a Japanese animation festival in Washington, DC. There I met many fans who shared my same interest. I also met many prominent figures in the industry, including some famous Japanese artists from whom I obtained autographs. Recently I traveled to New York City for a Japanese animation symposium. Unlike the convention, which was more fan-based, this symposium was more academic and informative as to the artistic and business side of Japanese animation. There were many Japanese directors, artists, and American industry leaders who spoke, not only about the future of Japanese animation but also about the past and the long history of the art culture. I learned many things that weekend, and I enjoyed that we were able to ask questions directly of the animators and producers and were able to participate in the workshops they held.

One of the experts who spoke was Dr. Susan Napier, who is an associate professor of Asian Studies at the University of Texas. Right now she is writing a book on Japanese animation and what attracts teens and adults to it. Since the symposium, I now correspond frequently with her, sharing information about what it's like being a teen with an interest in this art form. At her request, I have collected data for her in the field regarding research for her book.

What also impressed me greatly at this symposium was the fluency in the Japanese language that the English translators possessed. It was astonishing that they could listen to the Japanese speaker and then spout out a translation in a matter of seconds. Seeing this encouraged me even more to continue with the Japanese language, which I've been studying diligently since the fall. It's not the easiest language to learn, and not many people continue with it because you have to devote a lot of time, especially if you want to learn the writing system. But I have decided that this is one of the languages that I want to be able to speak and write fluently. I guess the reason for this is that the more videos I watched, the more I wanted to learn about this culture and the language. I felt cheated because I couldn't understand the movie without reading the subtitles; I wanted to understand it in its original format. So, I continue to study hard. It makes me really happy today when I can understand some of the dialogue. But now I think it goes deeper than just trying to understand a movie. It's being passionate about learning a language and culture of another people. This brings a whole new world to your doorstep.

That day when I watched my first ANIME film, I thought I'd just be watching a movie. Little did I know it would change my life forever. Discovering this art form has redirected my life and made it more interesting. I've discovered a new language, new friends, new activities, and now I'm just about to open my online ANIME store. Three years ago, if anyone had predicted my involvement with the Japanese language and culture, I wouldn't have believed them. But I am glad I did watch that film. Someday I will travel to Japan. Who knows where else this ANIME interest will lead me? It might even get me a job someday. All I know is that life takes unexpected, surprising turns.

He Wasn't Musical

From Noam Sturmwind of British Columbia:

I've always enjoyed singing, but I hadn't done any formal signing until about a year ago, when I joined the Jewish Community Choir. I had heard them peforming, and I decided that I'd like to try it. Although singing in a choir was a new experience, that's not the part that surprised me. What surprised me was that as a result of singing in the choir, I became interested in learning how to read music and in playing the piano.

I had never been interested in playing an instrument before. It just wasn't something I wanted to devote any time to. People suggested it to me but I said I didn't want to. Then I went to my first choir practice and tried to follow along with everyone else. I was constantly asking questions about the music, and that got me interested in how music works. One of the people in the choir is a piano teacher, and one day she was showing me some things on the piano that related to the music we were singing. I found myself interested in the piano, and it was right then that I said I'd like to take a lesson.

Before this, I didn't think I was a musical person. Well, I knew that I enjoyed singing and listening to music, but I didn't consider myself the type to play an instrument. I was really surprised about that; I couldn't have predicted that I would become interested in it. But you never know what's going to happen. I think it's good to give things a try and see if you like them or not. You don't lose anything by trying it once.

Classical Piano? No Way!

From Kate Mende Fridkis (NJ):

I love to play the piano. I have been playing since I was 6 years old (I'm 13 now). My favorite type of music is jazz. For about a year when I was 10, I studied with a jazz pianist. One day my father's cousin Eleanor visited from California. Eleanor is an accomplished classical pianist who has performed at Carnegie Hall. When she discovered that I couldn't read music, she was shocked. "You have to take her out of these lessons," she told my parents. "Reading music is the key to the musical world."

My parents' good friend recommended The New School for Music Study, where she had previously taught. The school specializes in classical music. My parents decided to send me there to develop my reading skills and technique.

This was very upsetting to me. I loved my teacher and jazz. Now my parents were taking me away from both. I despised classical music. In my opinion, it was overly structured and boring. My journal was burdened with entries about how I would never forgive my parents for this cruel injustice.

My parents did talk about their decision with me. They told me it was going to be better for me in the long run and that's why they made the decision. At the time, I couldn't really see what they meant.

Soon I started lessons at the New School. At first, the easy music and repetition discouraged me. Because of my abilities in jazz and my nonexistent skill at reading music, it was hard for me to make the transition from playing by ear to reading music.

This year, I started learning longer, more complex pieces, and I found that I began to enjoy playing them. They had intricate fingerings and difficult melodies in both hands. My training at the New School has improved my technique and reading, along with other important musical skills such as touch and theory. This past September I was accepted into the PEP (Program for Excellence in Piano Study) class and I decided I was most certainly staying.

Today I enjoy both jazz and classical music. I have noticed that my classical training shows in my jazz playing by improving the technique and fingering. My enjoyment of classical music surprised me and I am glad I made the change. I think my parents knew me well enough to know what would be good for me to try. If parents know their child, they have a good chance of knowing what they'll benefit from. I think that if I had really hated classical music after doing it for a while, I would have gone back to my jazz lessons. But usually, if you haven't experienced something, it's hard to know whether you'll like it or not. If someone recommends something to you, and that person knows you well, you should probably give it a try. Of course, sometimes you just *know* that something is not your type of thing. But sometimes you can be surprised, too.

Discovering Eleanor Roosevelt

From Julian Church (CT):

I sigh at the idea of doing a research report. My mother has assigned them a few times (not often, thankfully!), but this is the longest one yet – ten pages, on any topic I choose. I'm considering writing about gibbons, as in the ape, not the person, because I've always been interested in the animal and once gave a speech on them. But I shy away from the idea of writing such a long paper on a topic which, though interesting, could be quickly exhausted.

Just before we go to the library to get some gibbon information, we go to see a play called *The Steps of Lincoln*. There are only four actors, two women and two men, but they are professional and pull off the nine roles with ease. The play is about Eleanor Roosevelt and the black singer Marian Anderson. I am amazed at how far Eleanor dared to stick her neck out to defend a person she didn't even know. I have her same reaction to injustice, but I know I wouldn't be brave enough to risk a lot for a stranger.

Gibbons are quickly forgotten. We hurry to the library where I find thirty books on Eleanor Roosevelt. I weed through them and check out twenty. I devour the books all afternoon and over dinner, finding the subject very interesting, but still I am less than thrilled about actually writing the report. I continually put off starting to write in favor of more research, but finally I must begin.

I have an outline, thirteen reference books, and twenty-five note cards in four divisions spread in front of me, plus printouts from the Internet (there were at least 200 websites on Eleanor Roosevelt!). Once I start to type, the report seems to write itself. I am actually enjoying it, and am typing faster than I thought I could. I've just written the first paragraph and I have 500 words. By the time I finish the first draft, I understand more about Eleanor's character and motivations than was written in the books I read. I have twelve pages. I revise, add some, cut a little. By the last draft, I have 17 pages, including footnotes and bibliography.

I realize that I loved writing the paper, which surprises me, although I would not welcome another assignment like this soon. And I promise myself to aspire to have as much character and compassion as Eleanor, one of my role models.

Newsletter Leads to Choir

From Chris Culp of Florida:

Three years ago, I was the co-editor of a small homeschooling newsletter in our area. Basically, I just typed the stuff in, and my mom worked out the details. It was quite a job for a 12-year-old, and I had a lot of fun doing it. In editing the newsletter, we sometimes added area events and newsworthy items that we thought our homeschool group would enjoy. Most of the time, I just typed the information in without even thinking about it. But one day, my mother read out to me one of the letters we received.

I had just gone through my drama phase; after spending a week at camp on stage in front of my fellow campers, I was thinking about a life on stage and screen, which is part of the reason I was as interested as I was in what my mom had to say.

"Look at this, Chris," she said. "There is a choir having auditions next week."

After giving a quick glance over the letter, I turned back to the book I was reading. "Sounds fun," I said.

"Do you think it would be something you would want to do?" she asked. "I think it would be a great way for you to learn about auditions and that kind of thing."

"Sure, I'll think about it." I really had no idea what I was getting into at this point.

"Great. I'll give them a call. Maybe your brother would be interested too."

The next Monday, my brother and I were taken to audition for the Orlando Deanery Boychoir. I remember feeling that mix of excitement and fear you get when you crest the first hill of a roller coaster. A man by the name of Ben Lane met us at the stairs and took us up to a small conference room.

"I'd like to start off by hearing both your boys' voices." Mr. Lane said. "Chris, why don't you come back with me and we'll test your range." Stepping down another hallway in the Cathedral, we entered a small office with a piano in the corner.

"OK, let's hear what your voice sounds like," Mr. Lane said. For the next fifteen minutes I was going up and down the scale, starting at middle C, and ranging into the upper octaves. After a while, I asked him why we were focusing on the high notes.

"Oh, The Orlando Deanery Boychoir is a treble choir," he said. I was stunned. At the time, I knew little about music. But I sure knew what treble meant.

"Now, let's hear you sing a few hymns." The audition continued, and after some time passed, I knew I had blown it. My voice sounded horrible, and none of the words were coming out right. We headed back into the conference room. After taking my brother Nick, Mr. Lane disappeared back into his office.

I could hear my brother singing away in the other room. "No matter," I said to myself, sure I would never be accepted into the choir. "It was just a practice." I really wasn't interested in the choir anyway. And an all-treble choir? It seemed crazy to me. Nick's voice was carrying down the hallway. Every note sounded perfect. "At least he'll be able to join," I thought to myself.

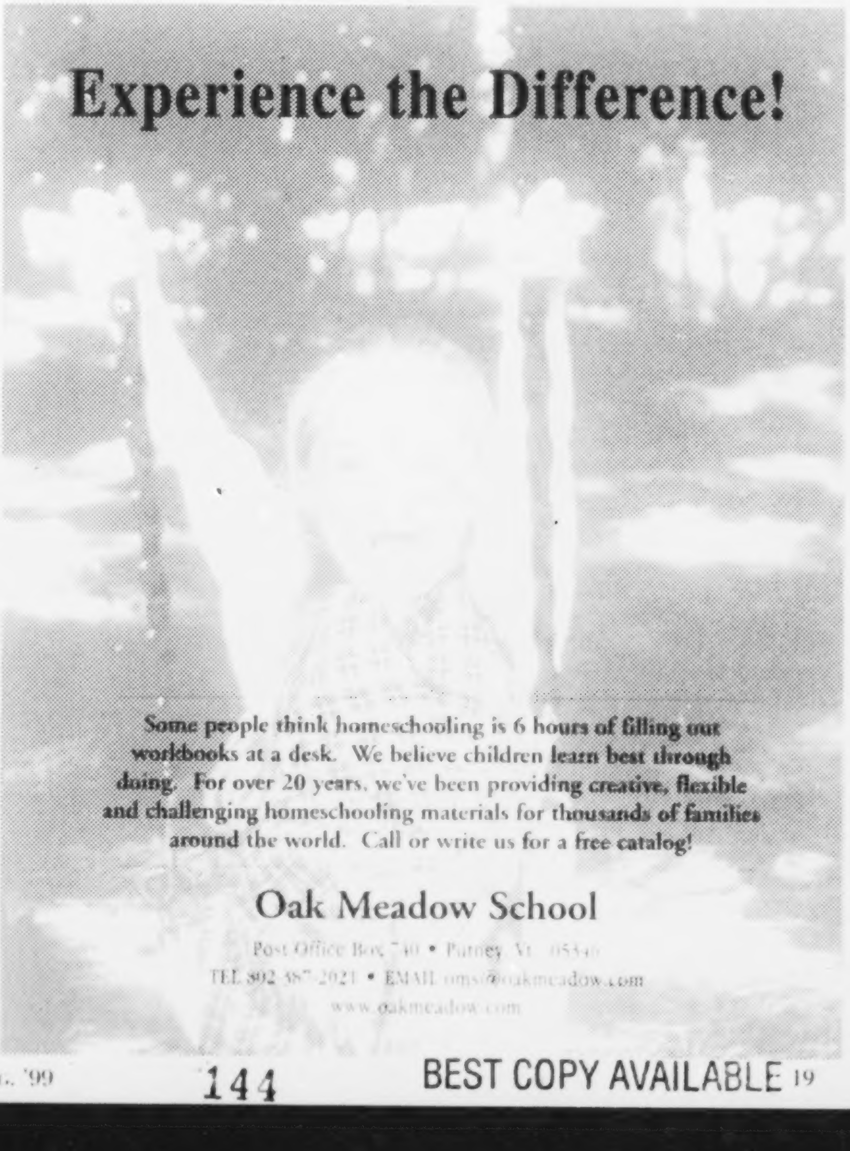
A few minutes later, Nick and Mr. Lane came back into the room. Sitting down, he passed some forms to my parents and started to talk about the choir. "We are the premier Boyschoir in the southeast, and the ambassadors for Orlando," he was saying. I remember thinking how strange all this pomp was.

"This year, our choir will be taking a tour to New York City, to sing at Carnegie Hall and The Cathedral of St. John the Divine." This was more than I had ever hoped for. Then Mr. Lane said,

"Well, I think, if it's OK with you, we'd like Chris to join the choir. It sounds like he would make a fine alto singer, and it would be great to have him with us on tour next summer." With the smiling faces of my parents and Mr. Lane, and the hope that I would be on tour in New York, I was stunned speechless. Mr. Lane said that he'd like Nick to join the training choir, and he went on to talk about the details of the tour and of life as a choir boy, but I had tuned him out. I was too busy thinking about New York, not even caring what kind of practice it would take to get there.

The next week I had my first practice and then performance, singing the *National Anthem* at an Orlando Cubs baseball game. At first I wasn't so interested in the music as I was in the trip to New York and in making friends in the choir. But slowly I began to realize what the music meant to me and how it brought me closer to the Lord.

Three years have passed now, and I have learned a lot in that time. When I started at age 12, I knew nothing about classical music, and really didn't care to learn anything about it. Since then I have become the Head Chorister of the choir, performed over 50 concerts, and learned hundreds of songs – learning more about life and God with each one. ◆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Watching Children Learn

Leading a Writing Group

Lael Whitehead (BC) sent us an article that she wrote for her local home-schooling group's newsletter:

For the past seven months a group of 12 homeschooled kids, ranging in age from 8 to 14, has been meeting at our house every other week for a writers' group. The session lasts about two hours. During the first hour, members of the group take turns reading aloud material they have brought from home. Some of them bring chapters of ongoing novels, others read poems or short stories, and we have even had essays and theatre reviews. During the second hour, we do a writing exercise (for example, I might ask them to create a character sketch, or to choose a color and write a poem about it, or make a written response to a painting or photograph), which we then read out loud. After the two hours are up, we gather in the kitchen for a snack. Usually everyone feels pretty high and excited, and there are days when several kids stay on at the writing table for another hour, too inspired to leave off working on their stories.

My oldest daughter, Lauren (12), came up with the idea of holding a writers' group. She and her friend Keridwen contacted other homeschoolers and took down names of those who were interested in joining. They planned at first to run the group themselves, without any adult involvement. But after the first two sessions, Lauren asked for my help. She and the other writers felt it was too hard for everyone to stay focused without someone to guide and facilitate the meetings.

I hesitated to step in, at first. I really wanted the kids to feel this was their group. But I also realized that the request for help had come from them; they had asked me to act as their mentor. Unlike in a typical English class in school, I wasn't imposing myself and my agenda on them, uninvited.

My role in the group now is to come up with a writing exercise each time (which I get to do too!), and also to generate some discussion about the works that each writer reads aloud. We have an agreement that the comments we make on each other's writing are always supportive and encouraging. We never criticize spelling or grammar. We point out what we especially like about the work. We ask questions about what confuses us, and sometimes make suggestions, but always in a spirit of appreciation and acceptance. We clap after each reading. At the end of the year we plan to produce a "Collected Works" of the group, with each member contributing their favorite pieces.

Facilitating this group has been a very exciting experience for me. Each time I hear these young people read, I am astonished again by their incredible creativity, their willingness to take risks and try new things and to share their creations with others. I am also really impressed by how respectful they are of one another. There is never any snickering or whispering, no yawns of boredom. Despite the range of age and ability, the members of the group listen to each other carefully, with their full attention. In fact, they keep better track of the recurring themes and characters in each other's stories than I can.

Writing hasn't always been a big priority for my kids. In fact, until this past year, Lauren hardly ever chose to write. At 11, her spelling was pretty wobbly, and she didn't know the first thing about punctuation. This year, however, both she and her sister Marlise (10) seem to be writing all the time – in their journals, on the computer, emailing to friends. Their spelling, though still not perfect, improves dramatically with every day, not because I nag but because they want to spell better. Lauren mastered the basics of punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization in about five minutes, once she had decided she wanted to write a novel and try to get it published. They have even been trying out haiku, sonnets, and plays, and Lauren is even asking me to show her how to write a "proper" essay. Given where her head and heart were at even a year ago, this new interest in writing still amazes me.

During the past seven months I have often wondered: how would the dynamics of the writers' group change if the kids knew I was going to give them a grade at the end of the term?

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If some were going to get A's, some B's, and some C's, how would that affect their writing? How would it affect the way they treated one another? How much energy would they have to spend vying for my attention and approval? How long would it take before the fear of being judged began to corrode their creativity?

There is an old saying: you can't be both a judge and a counselor. Since I am not sitting in the position of judge over these young writers, I am able to encourage and support them. And they, in turn, are more able to do the same for each other. Since they come here of their own free will, they arrive eager to participate. The result is an atmosphere in the group that is both very serious (in the sense that we all take the task of writing seriously) and at the same time relaxed and lively and genuinely fun. I have a feeling that any decent high school English teacher would give their right arm for such a group. I doubt, however, that such a group could survive for long under the conditions that most high school teachers would seek to impose on it. That is, once the teacher took on the role of judge, promising A's and threatening C's, she would lose her ability to act as a mentor. Competition would strain the relationships among the kids themselves. After a while, writing would become "work" for many of them, a difficult and painful chore to be avoided if at all possible (which is exactly how most adults feel about writing). Any youthful urge to write would probably get thoroughly nipped in the bud.

Perhaps if my hypothetical teacher could spend an afternoon with the homeschooled writers' group she'd be willing to chuck out her gold stars once and for all. These young writers don't need bribes or threats. They are irrepressible, full of plans for what they will write next, eager to share what they have just finished. They feel no anxiety about getting it right, but, wonderfully, since they write and read a lot, their literary skills are getting a lot of practice and they can't help but improve.

Most important of all, these young writers are finding out that writing can be a tool for self-expression, for

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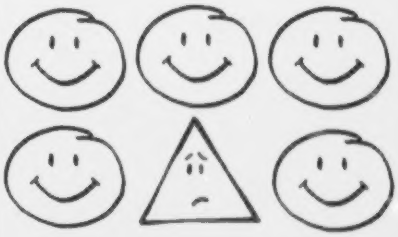

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exploring the world, and for figuring out what matters. If you asked any one of them if they plan to be a writer when they grow up, they would very likely answer, "I am a writer, right now."

Drawing Without Schooling

Annie Stocklein (WI) writes:

I'm 13, and about three years ago, my brothers and I started homeschooling. It was a decision none of us expected, but we all agree it was a good one. Danny, the younger brother, couldn't wait to begin and promptly started. He packed his stuff and quit school. My older brother and I decided to wait until the end of the school year and kept a low profile, telling no one but our closest friends. But word got out, thanks to Danny. He was at the library with our Mom and started telling everyone. Soon they were all over me asking questions.

I stopped schooling at a local parochial school for many reasons. One reason had to do with my drawing. First, I couldn't sit in my seat while drawing (I still can't!) and this apparently made my teachers mad. Second, I didn't really like the art projects we did. The teacher would plop a piece of paper in front of us and say, "Here, draw a clown," or "Glue some of these scraps of paper on this paper."

When you grow without schooling, you can learn whatever you want to learn. This can be very helpful when learning art. Instead of being forced to draw a leprechaun, you can draw a leprechaun with a machine gun (which, sadly, you can't do in school).

I've been drawing since I can remember. My drawings and those of my brothers fill the walls of my dad's office, like a huge timeline. I've filled tons of sketchbooks and gone through hundreds of crayons, markers, and finger paints. I take classes at two local art museums, with instruction in pottery, clay, mixed media, cartooning, and photography. They're so much different from school classes, in lots of ways. For instance, we can create whatever our imaginations can think up.

My favorite subject to draw is people. When I was 2, they looked like triangles with legs and whiskers (that were actually hands). They soon evolved into squares and then took on the look of humans. When I was in school and we did book reports, I used the back of the report form for drawing my favorite parts of the book (in fact, I still do some of my best drawings on the backside of menus and paper placemats).

As time has passed, I've added more detail to my artwork. I have also added more color and background. I've made some cartoon characters and what I call fashion illustration. When I do fashion drawings, I usually don't know what to draw – I just like drawing people. I can see myself doing fashion illustrations when I'm older.

I drew one of my favorite drawings while at a baseball game. I brought along a tiny sketchbook and drew a tiny drawing of a bleacher drama. I soon colored it and made it into a comic strip for our family newsletter. Our family was featured in our local newspaper in an article explaining how families use newsletters to communicate. My illustration was featured on the front page.

I think I'll always be drawing something, and I'd like to be able to earn a living doing it. I think I have a lot more chances to express myself in art (and in other things) by being able to learn and grow without schooling.

Father and Daughter Learn Recorder Together

Michael Sklaroff (NY) writes:

Amelia (7) first picked up the recorder at my parents' house. She was trying to sound out "Hot Cross Buns," and since she seemed so intent on figuring it out, when we returned home I bought a couple of plastic recorders and a music instruction book at the local music store. Over several subsequent weeks, I attempted to interest her in working together with the book and the instrument. "Not right now, Dad" and "Later!" were her invariable responses. So *I* started to work on it. I had taken musical instrument lessons both in

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public school and with private teachers, so I knew I could read enough music to get myself going. What I discovered was that playing the recorder was lots of fun. I didn't like the first book I had purchased, so I got another one (Ralph Wm. Zeitlin's *Basic Recorder Lessons*, Amsco Publications, 1978) that seemed better suited to both me and Amelia. I learned that there are many duets, trios, and quartets for the recorder, and I got excited at the idea of eventually being able to play with both Amelia and – when he gets older – 3-year-old Jonah.

After a month of practicing on my own (my wife was getting rather tired of my "high-pitched squeaking"), I asked Amelia one day if she wanted to work on the recorder with me. She again tried to put me off, but I urged her to try it and we began.

She looked at the fingerings for the first two notes and quickly learned how to play them and how to read the musical notation for them. We worked together on the third note, and then she played a short piece using just those three notes. The very next piece of music in the book was a simple duet for "student" and "teacher." This piece was appropriate for both of our abilities, and we played it without too much difficulty.

When we finished, Amelia was beaming. "Dad, it was really music!" she said excitedly. She was right – it really sounded like something. The teacher's part was just tuneful enough so that when played with the very simple, three-note student part, two people together sounded better than either would playing alone.

It was exciting for me, too. That look on Amelia's face! And her enthusiasm for what we had just done was contagious. She immediately wanted to play it again, and we did. And again. And again. One can learn to play simple pieces on the recorder without much difficulty. But the opportunity to play with somebody else – and have it sound so much better than one's beginning skills would allow for – really seemed to motivate Amelia.

Amelia remained very much in control of the way we practiced together. She would count the time to start us off, and she stopped us when she got hung up on a note. At times she would say that she wanted to practice her part alone. Sometimes I was instructed to leave the room so that she could concentrate without being observed.

I tried to be supportive, mostly by following her lead and playing the pieces she wanted to, whenever she wanted to. At times her excitement would get the better of her and she would confuse herself by trying to play too fast. At other times she made mistakes going from one note to another and she walked away in frustration. I was always afraid that she would give up the recorder completely, but that never happened. She was eager to play for her mother and brother and visitors – anyone. Hardly a day went by that she (we) didn't practice.

My wife and I had talked frequently about music lessons for Amelia, and we always wondered how we would deal with the issue of practicing. We have heard battle stories about piano practice from both schooling and homeschooling families. Some parents said that while it was initially a struggle to get the child to practice, once they had achieved some ability to play something that sounded like music, they then seemed to like it enough to want to play on their own. But this seemed to me to carry the same risks as having a child turned off to reading and learning by being forced to do the kind of schoolwork that many homeschooling parents have rejected. It was gratifying to see Amelia take to this musical instrument and keep at it because *she* liked it. The recorder is always accessible, and because Amelia is home most of the day, she can play whenever she is in the mood. And she does. If she were in school, she'd have a shorter period of time in the afternoon to squeeze in playing with friends, relaxing, doing homework, doing nothing, reading, having dinner, having a bath, and going to bed. And practicing music, I fear, would become a more scheduled, parent-driven activity. ◆

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The Education Debates

Last year, Canadian Broadcasting Company's David Cayley produced a 15-part radio program called "The Education Debates," as part of the series *Ideas*. Cayley interviewed many fascinating thinkers; we excerpt here from some of our favorites.

Frank Smith

Systematic Education

In about the 1850s, people decided that education and agriculture and manufacturing needed to be systematized. It wasn't a matter of changing the machinery in order to fit the individual but changing the individual to fit the machinery. .... The whole notion that the best way to breed chickens is to put them into batteries came into agriculture at the same time the whole notion that the best way to educate kids was to put them into batteries and treat them to batteries of tests came into schools. And so education started to get organized, first of all, by putting walls into classrooms so that older kids couldn't interact with younger kids, which I think was a tremendous social change because outside school it's the older kids who always teach the younger kids. I mean, that's just the way of life. We talk about organizing children on the basis of age and ability as though that's the highest ideal of education. But in fact, I think what we're doing is organizing kids on the basis of inexperience and inability to help anyone else. We're organizing them on the basis of ignorance, as though the ideal classroom situation is when no child can help any other child in the classroom. And in fact, they're discouraged from doing that, as you know, because that's called cheating.

... [Then] what they wanted was to make learning scientific, and in order for learning to be scientific you've got to have something that you can measure, something you can count, you've got to have a unit and you've got to be able to conduct experiments. Nobody had any idea of how you could do any of these things. It was recognized that learning was a function of interest and comprehension, interest and past experience. But people differ all the time on the basis of what they're interested in and past experience. So how could you possibly compare people on any aspect of learning without, in fact, getting all your data muddied by what they are particularly interested in and by what they particularly have a lot of experience in?

And then it was all solved. It was all solved by one man. ... He was a psychologist. He was a Prussian. His name was Herman Ebbinghaus, and he tackled this problem of how psychology could become a science. They needed something they could measure. So he tackled this problem of finding something in learning that was not contaminated – that's the scientific word; we still use it today – that was not contaminated by past interest or experience. And Ebbinghaus had this enormous insight ... that if you want to study learning without contaminating your data with past experience, comprehension, and interest, *what you do is study how* people learn nonsense. If you study nonsense, nobody, by definition, can make sense of it. And nobody has got any interest in nonsense. It's pure. It's unsullied learning, according to Ebbinghaus.

Incredibly, he shut himself away for two years, and he looked at how long it took him to learn [lists of] meaningless syllables in groups of ten and groups of twelve. How many learning trials or how many repetitions were required. And what he got, which is what delighted him, of course, was lawful results, predictable results. And this applies all over the world. You can take a group of people in Africa, a group of people in China, a group of people in Britain, give them a meaningless learning task and they will perform it exactly the same way. They'll learn the first two or three items pretty quickly. After that it takes more and more time to learn successive items until you reach about ten, when it flattens out. It's called the Learning Curve. You can attach an algebraic formula to it. It's the learning curve, and it's all based on nonsense. You could push people up the curve. It's the origin of the contemporary view that if a child doesn't learn something the first time, teach it to them a second time, teach it to them a third time. You can push them up. Learning is work. If people are working hard enough, if they're properly motivated, if you give them the right rewards, you can get them up the curve.

Measuring Learning

[The idea] that repetition will result in learning, and that you can ensure learning by pushing people up, had this wonderful advantage to the

When President Clinton decides that he's going to be the education president, what is he going to do? More tests. What does Tony Blair do in Britain? More tests. It's all doomed to get us nowhere because the forgetting follows immediately.

organizers of education. Not to teachers, but to people outside education who wanted to organize it in that there were units that you could count, units that you could measure. So you could say that this child has learned seven of these things today and this child has only learned five. And very quickly that was all that attention was paid to in the classroom – the ability to perform this nonsensical task. And once again, if kids could make any *sense out of what they were supposed* to learn, the vocabulary items or the punctuation items or the spelling or something, it was regarded as akin to cheating because they had some kind of advantage, they didn't have to work to do the learning. But incidentally, Ebbinghaus ... also discovered that there was a forgetting curve, that immediately after the last learning trial, immediately after the last repetition, you start to forget ...

Tests and More Tests

The big thing that came along, that really hammered psychology's crazy theory of learning into education, was the testing movement ... What testing needs is a small unit that you can measure, that you can count, that you can compare and contrast and these days, heaven help us, publish the league tables for how schools are doing on this matter of systematic, nonsensical learning. ... Even today, when President Clinton decides that he's going to be the education president, what is he going to do? More tests. What does Tony Blair do in Britain? More tests. What does every provincial government in Canada do when they say they're going to improve education? They devise more tests. And tests and the curriculum are locked together in this progressive, fragmentary way of learning, or trying to get kids to learn by memorization. It's all doomed to get us nowhere because the forgetting follows immediately, but the tragedy is that the actual experience of trying to learn and the actual experience of passing a test or not passing a test is something that we can never forget.

We Look for Meaning

Nobody has to tell us we've got to make sense of the world. We look for consistency. We look for conventions. We look for reasons why other people do things. We look to make sense of the world. And that's what drives children to make sense of language, and eventually to make sense of reading and writing and mathematics. Kids want to understand the world. We do not enjoy confusion. We do not enjoy not understanding where we are and why we're there. But the second thing is, we have this remarkable ability to, in fact, make sense of the world. You just have to look at how people carry on in situations outside schools to see how they will help each other, how they will try to make things clear to each other. If somebody's struggling with something, they try to help them do it. I think that we all feel uncomfortable if we see someone who is confused. We all feel uncomfortable if we see someone who is beaten down by a particular situation. We're all natural teachers. We all want to share our enthusiasm. We all want to share those things that fascinate us. My confidence basically is that being a person is a good thing.

John Taylor Gatto

Problems That Aren't Problems

[When I started out as a substitute teacher] I was assigned to teach a Spanish course and I don't think they had an idea whether I spoke any or not. But I spoke a little Spanish. So I asked the kids what they had had so far. Apparently they'd had nothing. I said, well, I'm going to teach you how to tell time. And inside of one class everybody could tell time in Spanish. Well, word got back to the administration. I was hauled on the carpet and literally screamed at. I was told that I had destroyed the entire curriculum for the month of June, which was to teach them how to tell time. And I was baffled. I said, but it only takes 15 minutes. So I wasn't hired back at that place. But I would encounter this over and over again, problems that weren't problems at all. The problems were necessary to justify the apparatus. ...

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create some structural way to [make] young people indifferent to everything. And suppose we came up with the idea that we would enthusiastically launch them on an hourly basis on one or another project of art or thinking and then we would ring a bell and say you must stop and move immediately away from this. And we did that for year after year after year. Would that not produce an internal mechanism that said nothing is worth finishing? The adults' enthusiasm about starting the project is contradicted by this bell, which is then followed by the adults' adamant insistence that you stop doing what you're doing. ...

John Holt

(recorded in 1982)

Learning As Risk

Learning is, by definition, exploration. It's risk. It means moving from the known and the certain into the unknown and the uncertain. And people simply will not do it unless they are made to feel secure. People who try to teach adults new skills, new ideas, know they have to spend an extraordinary amount of time reassuring them and making them feel that they are in a minimum risk situation and that they're not going to be laughed at and criticized and so forth. This is one of the requirements of learning and it's one of the requirements that the schools quite spectacularly fail to satisfy. In school, risk and threat and humiliation and punishment quiver in the air every second; and, if nothing else happens to a child who makes a mistake, she or he is almost certain to be laughed at by his fellow students.

Will They Make a Better World?

[People have said to me,] if children are just learning at home and just learning the things that are interesting to them and pursuing their own interests and happiness, how are we going to make a better world, how are we going to deal with the problem of the starving and the oppressed and so forth? How are [children] going to learn the social virtues of generosity and kindness and compassion and concern and so forth?

And it's a good question, I think. For me, the best answer – I won't say it's a complete answer – but the best answer to this question is in my John L. Sullivan story. As the story goes, when he was Heavyweight Prizefighting Champion of the world, he was in New York City riding a trolley car one afternoon with a friend, standing up, holding onto a strap. The car came to a stop. A young man got on who'd been drinking in a saloon. He was a big man, and he'd had quite a lot to drink. He was feeling pretty belligerent. He pushed and shoved his way up the aisle, and as he came past John L. Sullivan he gave him a big shove with his shoulder and shoved him out of the way. John L. clutched at the strap to keep from losing his balance and this young man went back to the back of the car. John L.'s friend had seen this and said to John L., "Are you going to stand for that?" And John L. said, "Oh, I don't know why not." And the friend was furiously indignant. He said, "But you're the Heavyweight Champion of the World. You don't have to be so damned polite." John L. said, "The Heavyweight Champion of the World can afford to be polite."

Now, I think the social virtues are overflowings. They're surplus. People have enough kindness for others when they have enough for themselves. Otherwise not. It's perfectly true that some people come out of the experience of school and college with an ideology of social concern, but their ways of working for it are very often self-defeating. They tend to hate and despise their opponents. They don't convert people. They're not, for the most part, effective, and the proof of it we see in the world around us. My very strong feeling is that if children are allowed a growing up which enables them to become adults with a strong sense of their own dignity and competence and worth, they will extend these feelings to include other people.

Thanks to David Cayley and the CBC for permission to reprint this material. For info on the the tapes or complete transcript of this series, write CBC Ideas Transcripts, PO Box 500, Station A, Toronto ON M5W 1E6 or go to www.radio.cbc.ca ◆

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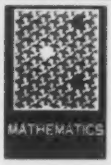

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ALFIE KOHN GETS HOMESCHOOLERS THINKING AND TALKING!

He supports our perspective while also challenging us to explore further. What does self-motivation really mean? How can we help kids do things because they want to and because they care, not just because someone told them to? And what if a child *isn't* motivated?

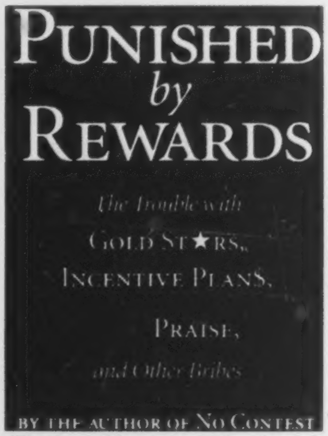
We're delighted to announce that Alfie Kohn will be the keynote speaker at our conference this September 24th-26th. If you haven't yet read his book *Punished by Rewards*, now is a great time to do it. To remind you of what makes Alfie Kohn so thought-provoking, and to whet your appetite for more, here are some excerpts from his interview with GWS:

If the question is, "Do rewards motivate kids?" the answer is yes, absolutely. They motivate them to get rewards. Unfortunately, that's usually at the expense of interest in and excellence at what they're doing.

Another reason for the negative effect of rewards is that the relationship between reward-giver and reward-recipient is ruptured. The child comes to see the adult as the goodie-dispenser, as opposed to a caring ally, and is less likely to acknowledge the need for help if that could jeopardize the chance of receiving the reward.

We have got to stop asking how motivated kids are and start asking *how* kids are motivated. Motivation is not a single entity that kids have more or less of. There's a huge difference between intrinsic motivation, which means loving what you do for its own sake, and extrinsic motivation, which means seeing that task as a prerequisite for some inducement.

... If kids are led to think about how well they're doing, even by relatively enlightened measures and methods, they may come to be less interested in *what* they're doing.



Children are so intrinsically motivated to make sense of their world, to play with letters, numbers, and ideas, that you can't stop them very easily. Eventually we do stop them, by getting them hooked on approval and grades, or getting them to fear some kind of punishment or disapproval. But the amazing self-fulfilling prophecy here is that after rewards and punishments have done their damage, and intrinsic motivation evaporates, we turn around and say, "You see! If we don't use carrots and sticks, they won't want to do anything."

— From ***Growing Without Schooling #101***

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1999 Directory was published in GWS #126.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is *not* a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Philip & Jane BAER (Pippa/84, Rollo/87) Bayshore School, 210 Unden St, Santa Cruz 95060 ••• Diane KALLAS & Bruce KOLLER (Ian/89, Bailey/92) 2225 Shasta Dr, Davis 95616 ••• Gary & Leslie FERRANTE (Roxana/85, Tasha/90, Kelly/91, Kia/94, Claire/98) PO Box 1090, Georgetown 95634 **(H)**

CO — Lorrie & Rick CARLSON (Anders/88, Jared/92) 545 Horse Thief Ln, Durango 81301 (change)

FL — Michael & Diana HURWITZ (Daniel/84) 8805 Sorrel Way, Clermont 34711 (change)

MA — Carrie & Sean BISHOP (Sean/88, Zack/91, Sara/93, Brady/96) Berkshire Mtns Homeschool Co-Op, 14 Blackstone Rd, Florida 01247-9400

MO — Celia & Jeff WADDELL (Clare/94, Mercer/96) PO Box 4345, Springfield 65808 **(H)**

NH — Ilene & Ed ORLOWSKI (Lindsay/86) 219 Parsons Hill, Strafford 03218

NJ — Gary & Jane Ann CARVALHO (Kelley Jane/92, Tomas/94, William/98) 208 Clover St, Roselle 07203

NC — David & Lisa WOOD (Justin/88, Kevin/90, Christopher/92) 2916 Tram Rd, Fuquay Varina 27526

PA — Joe & Mary Jo BAYER (Patrick/88) RR 2 Box 34B, Montrose 18801 ••• Anita & Rob SMULL (Jacob/85) 22 Hillcrest Av, Erdenheim 19038

TX — Brian & Leah Del SIGNORE (Damian/94, Dominique/96, Dione/98) 9734 Mystic Crossing, Houston 77065-4075 **(H)** ••• Stephanie & Steven HOLZBAUR (Sam/95) 6419 Water Point Ct, Kingwood 77346

VT — Erik & Barbara NIELSEN (Cora/79, Christina/84, Ingrid/87) RR 1 Box 1833, Brookfield 05036 **(H)** ••• Marcia CASSIDY & Paul HORAK (Peter/92, David/97) PO Box 711, Norwich 05055 ••• Joanne & Robert FINKEL (William/92) PO Box 150, Wardsboro 05355 **(H)**

VA — Kim PICKETT & Rory DePAOLIS (Joshua/88, Caleb/91) 100 E Weaver Av, Harrisonburg 22801 (change) ••• Victor & Elizabeth TAILLON (Robin/89, Phoebe/91, Ava/93) 7477 Hidden Lake Cir, Mechanicsville 23111-6291 (change)

WI — Elaine & Don SUNNEN (Amelia/92, Jonah/94) 416 Honeysuckle Hill, Lexington 24450 ••• Jeanne & Jeffry LEWIS (Jason/89, Callie/92) 1209 Green Av, Stevens Pt 54481 (H)

Canada:

BC — Jan HUNT (Jason/81) 360 Elizabeth Dr, Salt Spring Island V9K 1J5 (change)

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS. Please PRINT the info clearly.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1999 Directory (GWS #126)? Yes ___ No ___

Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

Elsewhere —

Susan McMINN-SEEFELDT & Steve SEEFELDT (Robin/85, Holly/87, Heather/89) 27 Alison St, Hamilton New Zealand **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #126:

NJ — Central Jersey Homeschoolers, 23D Franklin St, South Bound Brook 08880; rcostanz@ix.netcom.com

OH — Home Education Resource Ctr of Central OH, c/o Belinda Augustus, 1713 Keeler Ct, Columbus 43227; baugust@infinet.com; http://www.infinet.com/~baugust/lend.html

Group Address Changes:

MO — SHELL (Springfield Home Education: Learning for a Lifetime), c/o Donna Culbertson, PO Box 1412, Springfield 65801; 417-767-2214

National — National Homeschool Association, PO Box 327, Webster NY 14580-0327 (phone number remains the same)

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter. (3) If you're writing to a specific person, write "GWS" or "Holt Associates" on the envelope in addition to the individual's name.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or proscriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS, just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on

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previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

Subscriptions & Renewals

Subscriptions start with the next issue published. Our current rates are $25 for 6 issues, $45 for 12 issues, $60 for 18 issues. GWS is published every other month. A single issue costs $6.

Rates for **Canadian** subscribers: $29/yr. **Outside of North America**: $40/yr airmail, $29/yr surface mail (allow 2-3 months). Subscribers in U.S. territories pay U.S. rates.

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Back issues: Many of our back issues are still available, and we are happy to select back issues on any topic that interests you. Tell us how many issues you want, and on what topics, enclose the appropriate payment, and we'll select the best issues for you. Issues cost $3 each for subscribers, plus a flat rate of $3 postage per order; for non-subscribers, the rate is $6 per issue, postage paid.

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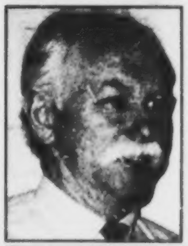
Alfie Kohn. See inside page for more details about Kohn's work. His books include *Punished By Rewards*, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* and his upcoming, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards."*

Linda Dobson. Editor of *The Homeschooling Book of Answers* will talk about "Growing Comfortable with Homeschooling." Dobson is also the author of *The Art of Education* and the upcoming *Homeschooling: The Early Years*. Dobson also edits *Home Education Magazine's* media column.



Peter Bergson. He and his wife Susan run Open Connections, a resource for homeschoolers in the Philadelphia area. Peter will discuss " Valuing Flexible Thinking" and "Men and Homeschooling." Peter trains groups in creative problem solving, and is part of a fathers' support group.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock. A lifelong homeschooler, Amanda graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1999. Among other topics, Amanda will address "I'm Still Me: Preserving Your Unschooling Self in College and the Office."

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/S ISSUE 130 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1999 US$6

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

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- OUR NEW BOOK –A SNEAK PREVIEW!
- INTERVIEW WITH ELAINE MAZLISH
- PARENTS WRITE ABOUT

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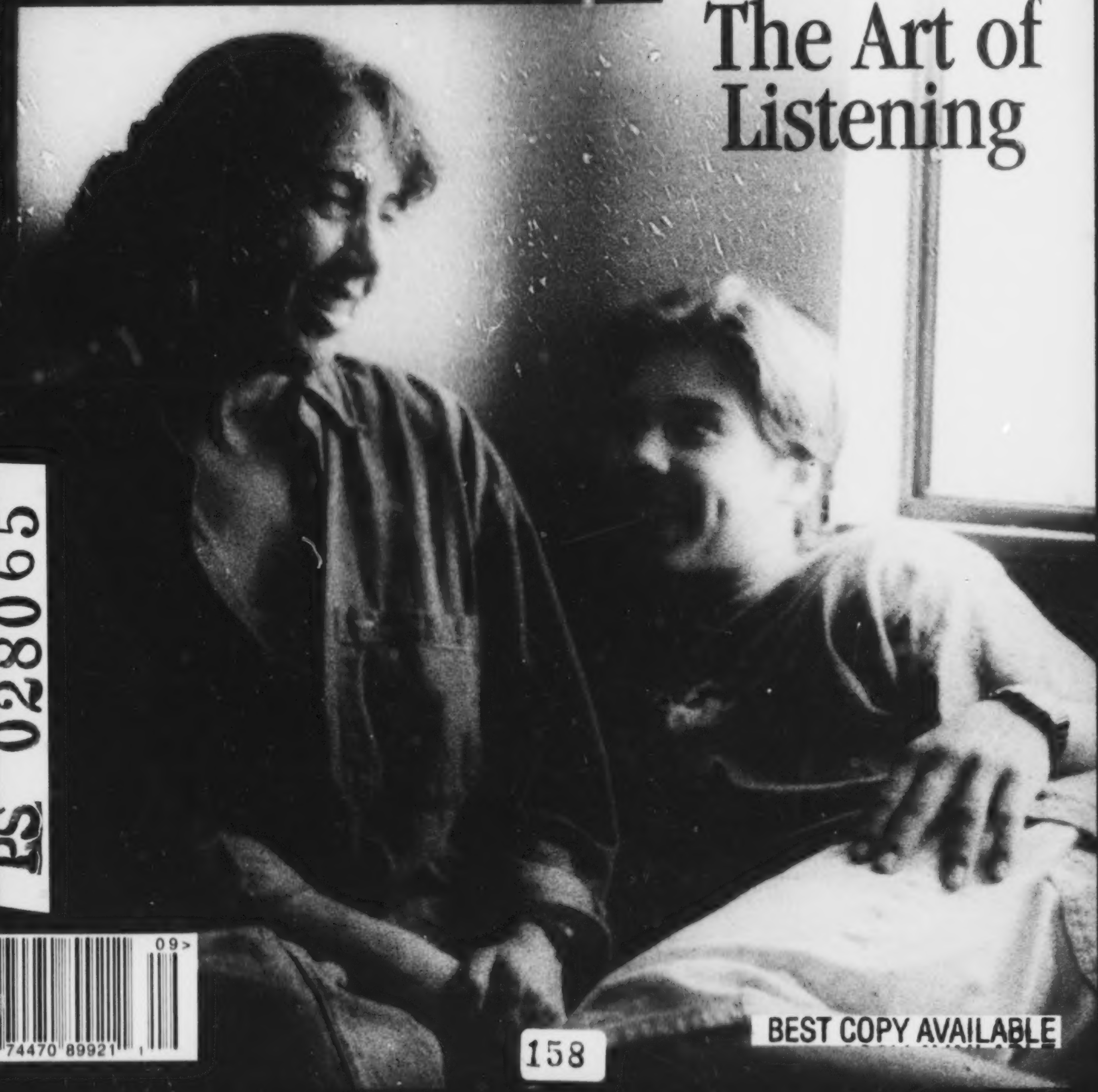

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GWS

FOUNDED IN 1977
BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

If parents told inquiring acquaintances that much of what they do in homeschooling is listen to their kids, the response might be rather skeptical. Listening sounds so simple. It sounds like less work than, say, planning a lesson or going on a field trip. But look how much the writers in this issue have to say about listening. Clearly it does lie at the heart of what these parents consider their essential job, their essential challenge.

The kind of active listening described in these pages is anything but simple. It requires that we pay attention to conflicting answers and multiple layers of truth, that we don't cover our ears or walk away even when we're hearing things we don't want to hear, that we listen closely and thoughtfully enough to make sense of what a child is saying even when the child herself isn't sure what she means.

I've never forgotten the time I asked a friend a question and he answered by *saying* yes but shaking his head no. The question was a frightening one and his response revealed the complex ambivalence of his feelings. Sitting there and listening, I had to take both answers into account. The listening was anything but a passive process.

Then there are the times when we have to listen hard even though we're not explicitly being asked to do that. Deb Shell writes about having to pay attention to her teenage daughter's increasing frustration and sadness; Andy Migner writes about struggling to make sense of her toddler's aggressive behavior in groups; Sherry Boas describes how her kids wander into the room where she's working and sit on the couch until she turns around. None of these stories has a child saying "Listen to me" in so many words. But isn't that what they're all saying anyway?

Sometimes, just the act of talking to a sympathetic listener makes things clearer. Kids say, "Thanks, you helped me figure that out," and all we really did was lend an ear while they sorted the matter out themselves. But it's not always that straightforward. Listening can feel like figuring out a puzzle, and not even necessarily because kids are deliberately keeping things from us but rather because they're not sure it's OK to say what's on their minds or because they haven't figured out for themselves what they really mean.

So adults rely on a lot of intuition and a lot of connecting the threads between various experiences and behaviors and comments. But we need a lot of humility too. We need to recognize that when we're guessing about what's really meant, we could be wrong. A mother told me about trying to get her daughter to talk about a difficult issue. The girl kept avoiding the conversation until she finally burst out, "I don't want to talk about this now because it'll make me cry and mess up the way I look before dance class!" The mother was understandably focused on the topic itself and misinterpreted the girl's reluctance. But if she learns from this, she'll be a better listener the next time.

Listening is indeed at the center of our efforts to live well with children – which means, of course, that it's also at the center of homeschooling. Enjoy this issue's thoughtful essays on the art of listening. — Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Defeating Legislation in California

Jill Boone, editor of the HomeSchool Association of California newsletter, writes:

California just elected a new Democratic governor, a person who ran on educational issues and who has vowed to handle the problems in our schools. So I was not surprised by the quantity of educational bills introduced in January. Homeschoolers in California have been prepared for some time for a homeschooling bill to be introduced. What came as a surprise to me was the type of legislation that was introduced.

AB804 was introduced to widen the powers of the child protection services to include educational neglect, defined (my summary) as a child not attending school and who is not making adequate progress. The judge who sponsored the bill was interested in having an extra handle to "help" children in abusive homes, and felt that CPS could determine if a child was making progress or not. This, of course, was unacceptable to us. The bill has been put to sleep but we expect it to return as a two-year bill with many amendments, including ours.

We were successful in our handling of this bill for many reasons. One, the HomeSchool Assn of CA has a professional lobbyist whom we work with and who has helped us to establish a presence in Sacramento that is respected and listened to. He has been with us for years and has demonstrated an understanding of homeschooling issues as well as the ability to get to the core of an issue and articulate our concerns. Two, we have a wonderful membership who responded quickly to the alert we sent out and flooded the committee office with faxes, mail, and phone calls. Three, all three of our state homeschooling organizations opposed the bill – with different tactics – so there wasn't internal homeschooling dissension, even though the other two groups chose to just oppose the bill (saying that no amendments would be satisfactory) and our group chose to work with the author and sponsor on amending it.

Our group chose to work on amending the bill for a couple of reasons. We were in a unique position because our lobbyist was approached at the beginning and asked for input, so we had the opportunity to be well heard and to be intimately involved with the process, and we chose to use that advantage to protect us all in case the bill went forward. Also, it does seem that these bills, even when dropped, often reincarnate in another form, so we went forward with our position.

We chose to offer an amendment that would not only have excluded those whose children were exempt from attendance requirements (pursuant to the ed code that covers the private school affidavit and tutoring options for homeschoolers) but also would have made a charge of educational neglect or harm insufficient by itself to instigate a child protection services (CPS) investigation. That would have protected all children and families and not just homeschoolers. CPS is overworked and burdened by too many children in the system already but that does not stop them from occasionally following through on an anonymous report on a homeschool family. It occurs less and less as homeschooling becomes more widely known and respected. Our amendments would not have stopped these misguided attempts at intervention, but would have clearly delineated that CPS was out of line in following up on these cases. Wording the amendments took a great deal of time, discussion and reflection, as well as three lawyers.

Eventually, the bill was dropped, but it raised interesting issues for me. Working on a bill that gives any power at all to CPS is an anathema to me. Having to choose between a practical approach and philosophical opposition was difficult. As homeschoolers, we are a strongly opinionated crowd, to say the least. But how worthwhile is strong philosophy when dealing with legislators? What I discovered in this process is that listening, trying to understand what the law makers are trying to accomplish, and speaking confidently and honestly are the best approaches. We knew early on it was not the lawmakers' intention to affect homeschoolers. The difficulty with opposing a bill, without working with legislators as well, is that they seek to accommodate the objections of the group without truly understanding those objections. Thus, they keep adding amendments that can actually make things worse. In the case of AB804, because many parents objected to the idea of having children removed from the home because of educational neglect, the legislators amended it to define *when* this could happen, and felt that they had handled the homeschoolers' concerns. Unfortunately, they opened up another can of worms by doing that and did not address the issue of oversight by CPS.

From my perspective, the important thing for a homeschooling group is to speak clearly for homeschooling interests and not be defensive or make excuses. We need to be involved in any legislation that affects us, even if we don't agree with it. Having a respected lobbyist lobbying for homeschooling is more valuable than I ever imagined and his knowledge and insight of the process was really helpful.

In addition to this bill, the Department of Motor Vehicles went to town on homeschooling and introduced a bill that would have made it impossible for homeschoolers to teach driver's ed and closed down the one correspondence course for driver's ed that is available. Then, they wrote regulations that overstepped their authority greatly and claimed that "small" private schools couldn't possibly do as good a job. Both the bill and the regulations were dropped because of opposition, primarily by Gina Gates of the Private Educational Network (who offers the only CA driver's ed correspondence course) and the CHEA (Christian Home Educators). HSC joined them in opposition and supported their comments.

The overriding question is how do we avoid bad homeschooling law? We are fortunate in CA that we do not have an antagonistic legislature. In fact, I was delighted to hear their responses at the hearing on AB804 and to realize that there was no debate on the legality of homeschooling by filing private affidavits (one of the most common options homeschooling families choose here). While our schools are in such disarray, I do not think we will have a bill with an intention of homeschooling oversight, but we need to stay prepared in case it comes. Our years of taking positions on small issues and talking to reporters and legislators about homeschooling have paid off with the recognition of homeschooling as a legitimate choice.

Raise Standards?

If you find yourself in discussions with people who say the solution to education's problems is to "raise standards," (or if you find yourself tempted by that idea), take a look at Susan Ohanian's new book *One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards* (Heinemann, 1999). It's a very funny, and very hard-hitting, critique of the standards movement and the people who champion it (Ohanian calls them "Standardistos," described as follows: "Give a Standardisto a pad of paper and a pencil and he goes nuts making lists of essential knowledge – without ever laying eyes on the children who must learn it."). Here's an excerpt from the book:

> Although most teachers avoid talking about it, the savviest among us are privy to a dirty little secret. I feel free to reveal it because corporate America won't have a clue as to what I am talking about. Are you ready? The fact is that kids don't necessarily learn what teachers teach. ...
>
> One year in the bleak upstate New York November of my life, I became determined to teach something. I decided to teach a concrete, observable, testable fragment of information. I decided that my seventh and eighth graders should "exhibit understanding" of some geographical features. God knows why, but I began to drill them on the names of cities, states, rivers, and lakes. I know there are plenty of Standardistos out there who will not be able to grasp this, but for poor, urban kids – kids who never take a drive around the block in a family car, never mind a cross-country trek – these geographical notions are a mystery.
>
> First, we had a quiz on all this stuff once a week. Then, as the weeks rolled by and the failing quizzes piled up, I got desperate and began testing every day. I mean, this was a gambit I wanted to win. At that particular time in my career, it was important to me to know that I was transmitting some bit of information to students; I guess I needed to prove that I could write a message on John Locke's blank slate. The test was the same every day: Name three countries. Name three states. Name three rivers. To understand the surreal quality of all this, you should know that our school was located about three blocks from the Hudson River. My students could warn me about not eating no rank fish caught from the polluted Hudson, but ask them to "Name a river" and they drew a blank. These were seventh and eighth graders. Go back to Chapter Five [of this book] and take a look at what California Standardistos decree seventh and eighth graders will learn.
>
> The kids proved me a failure. They never did pass that geography quiz. But in January, on the first day back from Christmas vacation, 62 percent of my students showed up waving fountain pens, their Christmas gift of choice, as they informed me. Can you imagine urban ghetto kids showing up at school waving fountain pens? Are you surprised? Confused? Guess what. Those obstreperous seventh and eighth graders didn't give a fig for their teacher's curriculum agenda, but they were fascinated by the fact that she wrote with a fountain pen.
>
> I know there is a deep moral in this story. For starters, it undoubtedly is a pie in the face of Standardistos, but I prefer to leave it "as is," a glorious tribute to the magic and mystery of teaching. And learning. The best thing we teachers have to take to our students is ourselves, who we are as people. This is what is so scary about teaching. We don't teach standards, not even international world-class standards; the best we have to take to our students looks back at us from the mirror every morning.

Answering Reporters' Questions

[SS:] A couple of recent conversations with reporters have reminded me, once again, how helpful it is to remember that we can always reclaim, and reframe, questions we get asked about homeschooling. Questions (from anyone, not just from reporters) are often phrased to contain implicit assumptions – assumptions of which the asker may not even be fully aware. So, for example, a *Washington Post* reporter called to ask about homeschoolers in college, and one of her questions was, "Is it hard for homeschoolers to adjust to the wider world when they get to college?" A common enough question, as we all know. I gave some brief answers and examples about how well many homeschoolers we hear from have adjusted to college, as well as the (also frequent) comment that college is an adjustment for anyone. But I also knew that inside this reporter's question lay the assumption that homeschoolers are *less* in the wider world than other kids are. So, even though I wasn't specifically asked about this, I took a moment to say that several homeschoolers have said – to me personally, and in GWS's pages over the years – that they think it's their schooled friends who are less familiar with the wider world; they're cooped up in that one building all day while the homeschoolers are out and about in their community. It's a strange idea, I said, that we remove kids from the stream of life and then spend years preparing them to return to it.

These are all comments I've made many times in many contexts, but it was worth making them again because the reporter said, "I never looked at it that way before; you've given me something to think about."

Then, a reporter from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* called because she was writing a story on summer opportunities for kids and she thought it would be interesting to hear what homeschoolers do in the summertime. I talked about some obvious examples, like Grace Llewellyn's Not Back to School Camp. But I also made a point of saying that for homeschoolers, the distinction between summer and the rest of the year doesn't need to be as sharp as it is for kids who go to school. True, the fact that the rest of the world does see summer as a special and distinct time certainly does affect homeschoolers. Their school friends are more available, and they may be participating in one of the many summer programs for young people. Still, they don't have to think in terms of *learning* during the school year and not learning, or taking time off from everything, during the summer months. I told the story I tell often about my homeschooling friend who befuddled her schooled friend because she was working on an essay during the month of July, which to him was unthinkable. For her, reading and writing were as natural in July as in October.

But there's another distinction it's also important to make, and I hastened to make it as I spoke to this reporter. I knew that, hearing my brief comments, it would be easy for someone used to thinking in school's terms to picture homeschoolers having what school students would call "summer school" - in other words, a continuation of the usual grind. When I said that homeschoolers don't have to distinguish between summer and the school year, I wasn't trying to imply that all homeschoolers are so industrious that they happily do their "lessons" 365 days of the year. So, once again, I had to anticipate the way that my questioner might be thinking of the question and then offer an answer that took that into account.

Whenever we get asked questions about homeschooling, it's possible for us to take a moment to reframe the question or to go beyond the first layer of the question and offer something a bit deeper. I've found that if we can do this and still keep our answers relatively concise, even reporters on tight deadlines are willing to listen.

Our Thanks to You

When readers around the country make an effort to let others know about GWS, it really makes a difference to us. We'd like to express our appreciation by noting at least one such effort in each issue. We also hope that reading about what some have done will inspire others to follow suit.

This issue's thanks goes to the Arlington/Belmont (MA) support group, who included a GWS flyer in its exhibit about homeschooling at the local public library – an easy, low-cost way to spread the word. ◆

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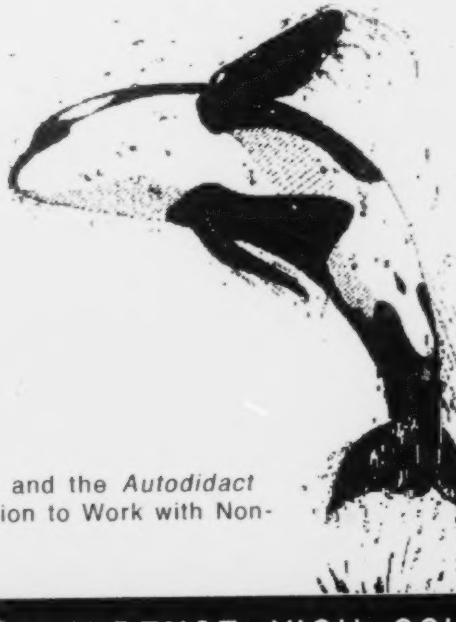

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Challenges & Concerns

In GWS #128, we printed three stories about how high school looks to homeschoolers. Now, we have three homeschoolers writing about how they experience college classes and how college feels to them.

Thinking About: Speaking in Class, Reading Assignments, Browsing

Dillon Wright Fitzgerald (PA) audited an American History course, "The Immigrant Experience," at a local state university the year she was technically a high school senior. In a summary of the experience, she wrote:

The lecture part of the course has been really excellent. Actually, most of my general history learning has come from lectures, because the professor spends some time lecturing to bring us up to speed on the historical background of our reading. The readings have been interesting, but for the most part incredibly dense. And they all are very long, too. It's hard for me to even begin to get the gist of something 20 pages long, when you only have two or three days (which equals an hour a day) to read it. In *assignment mode*, that is, which I will explain later. I find it hard to really digest such dense writing – it's like a body trying to digest rocks, actually. Often it really escapes me, after I've slogged through it, if the professor doesn't explain it more lucidly in class. Because, for something to really sink in, it helps to have seen it from many angles, having read and heard about it from many sources. I seem to be more and more an audio-learner, and I can digest things as I hear them, so lectures are effective. I feel a real connection with this teacher, too; and she does care about who and what she's teaching, as much as an overworked college professor can. I think she would do better with a more interested class, though.

What I don't like is the way the professor asks questions just for the right answers, to see who's read the assignment. Whoever answers gets a better grade in "class participation." It makes it all feel just a little too much like a game show, somehow. I'm sensitive to the fact that I probably don't want to take away these "points" others could earn for class participation by piping up with the answer myself too frequently, but I have been participating. Often I get interested in asking deeper questions, and the truth is, this type of education (in this particular environment, anyway) is completely concerned with answers, not questions. To understand what I mean by that, you just have to be sitting in the classroom and experiencing it:

Professor: "What have we learned about Japanese-American men?"

Student: "We have learned that they are often successful businessmen but rather distant authority figures to their children."

But I'm interested in *why* Japanese men, specifically, are often this way. The truth is, I would like to know why ethnic stereotypes come into existence and what ethnicity has to do with psychology, neither of which I really know yet. And of course, these sorts of questions are not what class is about – we certainly aren't all expected to be social historians and (heaven forbid) put forth our *own* opinions on these hallowed subjects. But we should be – that's how we'd learn.

It's an interesting dynamic: these students are taking the course for credit, to complete their "diversity" course requirement. I won't get any credit for having taken it, but what I "get" from it is no different. I'd like to find a good metaphor for this strange creature called credit, because at heart, I think it is really screwed up. I see its *raison d'etre*, but put in the correct perspective it seems awfully wrong and pointless. The truth is, and I believe this: *learning has nothing to do with* getting rewarded. Learning is often obstinately the opposite, actually. If it's done for any outside person, one's personal hold on it is not as strong. Yes, there are times when we can be good little students and complete our assignments and get a very real satisfaction out of that (I certainly have experienced that), but all interest in the assignment often just culminates in the satisfaction of *completing* the assignment. When I have finished an assignment, as interesting as it may have been, I usually don't ever want to see the subject matter again. It's finished, shelved, closed – and thank goodness!

There is another kind of learning (which I could call "real learning" but won't) and when I am engaged in it I lose all of the dysfunctions of my "assignment learning" mode, such as a sluggish reading pace, a small attention span, and a low information retention rate. This learning is not really considered learning at all, by the system; it's just nuggets of information I pick up, store, and never lose, because I care too much about them to lose them.

It's funny, I often have my two learning styles come into direct conflict, because I will go to my class, and sit, and listen, and take notes and give answers, and after it's over I'll walk to the library and just browse, which is my favorite thing to do and which stimulates me intellectually more than any other activity, even reading. Because, I think, just by walking up and down the shelves and looking at the titles of books, the *questions* are there, and also endless possibilities. It wakes me up to things and subjects I've never even thought about. That is so important. It's a very *large picture* kind of education, but it's good. I do find things that way, and I *can* contract my focus. But in order to zoom in, you have to have a wide-angle lens to start with, no?

Dillon adds:

The semester that I was taking that class, I was also working part time at an educational theatre company and interning at a theatre. All this was in a town about thirty minutes from where I live, and because I had to be in town on most weekdays, I stayed with a family in town, in their spare room, for a few days each week. That semester was my taste of "living away from home" for a while.

The company where I worked is called Learning Tomorrow Enterprises, and it is the place where I often felt I learned the most. The business employs three actors (including my boss, Rand Whipple, an actor, mime and graphic designer), who create and perform one-person shows to elementary school assemblies. I've been the office gopher and done practical work on a wide variety of projects.

The most interesting project was when Rand was creating a historical video montage that was projected onto huge screens for our town's First Night celebration on New Year's Eve. I had to scan old photos of the town at the Historical Society. It was fascinating and extremely educational. I liked that the computer work was always related to something either artistic or educational – I would shoot pictures of the town and then learn how to digitize them, or get to learn all about what the town looked like at the turn of century, while getting better at scanning things. I loved learning the architectural history, learning what these buildings actually used to be, what has been torn down, and what has stayed.

I think I know now why apprentices learn so much, often more than students do. Getting your hands into something and actually doing it often teaches you a lot about many other things, too. And you pick up a lot, just being around working people.

Finding Her Niche

From Dori Griffin of Tennessee:

Even after an entire year of college, I stil feel hesitant about writing down my experiences to share with others. The decision to go to college was a complicated, difficult one for me, and a lot of those confused feelings have persisted. Although I don't have magical clarity, I do have sophomore standing as a Graphic Design major at the University of Tennessee here in my hometown, Chattanooga. And I've learned a lot. I suppose the two questions I've been asked most are, "Was the adjustment difficult?" and "Did you feel prepared?" Just in case someone out there is as desperate as I once was to be assured that College Is Feasible, here are my answers.

First of all, yes, college is an adjustment – for everyone. As a homeschooler (and one who didn't "do school") my adjustments were different from most people's. But I don't think they were any bigger. I had to get used to getting up every morning and driving myself to school, where I would then spend anywhere from one to six hours. That was hard at first; I was constantly exhausted for the first couple of weeks. The biggest adjustment has probably been not having much time to call my own; I still resent that to some degree, and probably always will. On the other hand, I haven't had to adjust to being in a multi-age environment, being responsible for my own learning and progress, interacting on a professional level with adults, or staying on-track for long periods of time. (Art classes meet almost three hours a day each, and a lot of people find that really difficult; although I sometimes get tired of the unchanging scenery, I usually concentrate quite well.) All these things were familiar to me from my life as a homeschooler. So things have really been fairly even – everyone had to adjust to *some* things at first.

As to being prepared, that's a difficult question. Yes, I've certainly felt academically prepared. I've yet to be intellectually challenged – which is a bit frustrating – but at least I'm able to expend all of my energy on my art

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courses. Knowing how to think, and how to find information when I need it, has been invaluable; it amazes me how many college students are in the dark when it comes to those very basic skills.

As a Graphic Design major, a choice I made because of my interest in editing and publishing, I'm having to take a great many drawing courses. I've been prepared for my design-based courses, since I've had so much hands-on experience in that area, but drawing has been a challenge. My first semester was pretty disastrous; it seemed that no matter how hard I worked, I didn't ever improve enough. This past semester, though, with a different (and more laid back) professor, I've seen some progress – mostly, I think, because I haven't felt threatened. While my grade for both semesters is the same, I feel very different about myself and my drawing now in June than I did in December.

And as to emotional preparedness, well, that's been a bit of an adjustment, but not too big. I've made some friends, some of them other students and some of them (although this is a different kind of friendship) professors. I've learned how to pace myself and my homework so that I'm rarely overwhelmed, and I've adjusted to spending less time at home with my family.

There have been times when I've felt insecure and ready to give up. Some days are just plain awful – but, since I know that's true no matter what you're doing or where you are, I don't blame that on college itself (when I'm being reasonable). On the up side, though, I've met some wonderful, talented people who love what they're doing and are eager to share their knowledge and expertise with anyone who's honestly interested. College has provided a lot of opportunities: writing workshops, mentors, contests, possibilities for publication, and lots of free (well, once you've paid your tuition) advice. I've learned a lot about art and design; I've had English classes with some wonderful, inspired professors who have been willing to spend extra time with me outside of class; I've made some nice friends who share my interests.

I feel like I've probably found my niche in college; the art program is small, and it has an almost unschooled environment. While everyone is busily mixing paint or wielding a sharp blade against a lump of plaster, we talk about all sorts of interesting and off-the-wall stuff. So, while the year has been stressful and no one's more excited than I am about the prospect of a long, self-centered summer, I suppose that fall will find me once again darkening the doors of an institution of higher learning – a place I never expected to find myself, but a place that I quite often find I can enjoy.

Clash of Philosophies

Below is an excerpt from a letter that Erin Hughey-Commers (VA) wrote about her college classes:

I am taking one honors class and one regular one. The contrast is scary. In my honors English class, we work in groups, discussing and responding to each other's writing. I am in my element here; groups are small, so we can really work through things and get to know each other. I am coming to see how integral a part of the experience professors are. Dr. H. makes writing a group process and spends very little time lecturing. When he does talk to the class as a whole, it is almost always interesting and important. Basically, he provides the structure for our learning and is always there to answer questions. In the very method of his teaching, however, is the ackowledgment that learning comes from each student, who only needs outside guidance and stimulation to learn. For some reason, this acknowledgment is very important to me.

My Spanish teacher, in contrast, has all the desks facing her almost all the time, and nearly all the interaction is between her and the class (as she questions us, etc.) It feels a little like we are watching her warily, waiting for her to spring something on us. It also feels like she holds Spanish tightly in her hands, only releasing snatches of it for us. When I walk into a class, I am in effect surrendering my leadership in the learning process to a teacher. I think that a teacher's first responsibility is to give that role back to each student – make clear tohim or her that the teacher is simply there as a guide, a resource, a support, and that the learning is, as always, each student's. I don't think my Spanish teacher knows how to, or has ever thought about, giving her language to her students. ...

When we asked Erin for permission to print her letter, she not only said yes but also wrote us a longer essay about her college experience in general:

My first day at the local community college was a shock. I was caught in what was no less than a clash of philosophies. As a homeschooler, I often woke in the morning and climbed the mountain behind our house. Pausing as I neared the top, I would turn and see my world spread below me. In deciding to enter college, I discovered a longing to be challenged to new heights and depths and distances. I yearned to be liberated as I had been grounded – as a whole person.

I came to college, therefore, along a journey of learning and self-exploration, rather than in order to obtain a degree. Immediately this set me apart. The vast majority of the students at my school were there en route to somewhere else; they were busy building a transcript worthy of transferring to the University of Virginia, or scraping enough credits to escape with an associate's degree. The classes themselves were things merely to be borne. If you got an interesting teacher, then the hours would pass that much faster; if the teacher assigned was reputed to be "easy," then all the better for you. The transcript, however, was the main thing. I had anticipated community college as a place where people from all walks of life unite to share their perspectives and learn together. Instead, class was a temporary stopover; in between, students hurried through the halls wearing backpacks and blank expressions.

Every day, walking the halls and hills of campus brought forth in me an acute inner struggle. I hated the employment posters featuring smiling students sitting behind desks or standing proud in army uniform. I saw those smiles as lies, as blatant as those the students displayed in the posters advertising college. From the hierarchy of faculty to the arrangement of soft chairs in the student lounge to the design of promotional material, the idea of excitement and fulfillment in school was a well-painted facade. The irony was that I knew learning could be exciting and fulfilling and more – far more than the smiling counselors or the inventors of those trite phrases could know.

I often escaped the sterile study area and sat under a tree behind the main building. I was and felt very alone there. On one of the few days when I finished my homework in time to open my notebook, I wrote,

There is so much possibility in this day
And so little in how I fill it.

My friend Shakti and I often spent the entire 45-minute commute to college asking ourselves what was missing in school. We knew that certain elements of the discussion-based Honors program felt close to being right and that the structure at college as a whole felt terribly wrong. Although we believed that the conscious yearning for something more was unique within us, we were certain that virtually every student at school felt this gap. The students' disinterest in class, their verbal and facial expressions of boredom and mediocrity, conveyed resignation to an incomplete experience. Yet the dejected attitude which I myself fought against was accepted as if it were the dress code.

In the morning, when Shakti and I arrived at school, I wistfully watched the other students get out of their cars and head toward the buildings. I felt that we should all shout greetings to each other as we adjusted backpack straps and slammed doors. I imagined joining them, becoming one in a proverbial multitude flooding toward the college doors, unified in the knowledge that *This is our time, our moment to come into the world.* But there were only Shakti and I, finishing our conversation across her car roof and wishing each other well as we headed in separate directions.

Everything changed for me one day in October, when I had a concern about a paper I was writing and went into my English teacher's office for a consultation. This paper happened to be about the problems in the educational system, and, to my surprise, my professor endorsed not only my writing but also my views on public education's deficiencies. His warmth led me to ask him some questions about teaching and writing, and soon we were deep in a discussion about issues, ideas, and experience. As I drove home that night, I realized that I had found a piece of the missing element.

I began to look for excuses to walk through Dr. H's door. The hours in which I felt the most present and alive were the ones I spent in his office. Once I was seated across from him and had asked a question, the dialogue took its own course. Often my homework prevented me from going in to see him; while I was committed to my studies, it was frustrating to be missing what I felt was the best part of my college experience.

A short time later, I was able to express what was missing in school. *There's no spirit in the learning here,* I realized. *These classes only touch the mind.* This explained the lack of enthusiasm from the students. It also helped me rationalize why I felt divided within myself. In the act of separating information from experience, school severs the spirit from the mind. I felt this keenly in my Spanish class; what would have been a natural and exciting process in Mexico or Spain became tedious and rote in the classroom.

I am currently searching for a four-year college where there is plenty of room for individual expression and exploration and where the students are there because they want to be. In the meantime, I am looking forward to studying independently with Dr. H. this fall, as well as working with him in the office and classroom. I believe that as homeschoolers, we have one distinct advantage in school and in our culture as a whole: we know what it is to live and learn with joy and wholeness. It is up to each of us to find and create that for ourselves wherever we go. ◆

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"With Respect and Caring" — An Interview with Elaine Mazlish

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish are the authors of the bestselling *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* and several other books, including *Siblings Without Rivalry*. Their message of insistence on children's dignity and the importance of respecting children's feelings combines with a real compassion for how hard being a parent can be. In an issue of GWS that focuses on listening, we wanted this thoughtful perspective included. Here, speaking to us from New York, Elaine Mazlish talks about what gets in the way of respectful listening and how we can make an effort to listen well.

Can you describe, first, how comments from adults can deny kids' feelings?

I just close my eyes and picture what so many of us grew up with: "Mommy, it's hot in here." "It's not hot," says the mother. "It's cold." Or: "Mommy, I'm scared." "You have nothing to be frightened about." "Mommy, it hurts!" "Oh, no, it doesn't hurt, it's just a little scratch."

If you notice, with all of these examples, the parent's response comes out of caring; it doesn't come out of meanness. We want our children to be happy, to be well; we don't want them to have negative feelings. But responding as in those examples tells the child: you don't know what you know, you don't feel what you feel, you don't mean what you say. It literally can drive a child crazy. The child thinks, "I feel this but my mother says I don't feel it. I must be wrong to feel it."

What's the alternative, then?

If we are able to acknowledge a child's feelings, that's such a gift we can give. If a child says she's hot and you feel cold, to be able to say, "Oh, you feel hot, and I feel cold." To be able to separate the child's feelings from yours. Or, when the child says "it hurts," to be able to say, "Oh yes, even a paper cut can really hurt." Acknowledging a child's feelings makes the child feel visible and feel heard.

In one of your books you make the point that responding this way actually helps a child to be safer, too.

Yes, I'm glad you brought that up. In one of our parents workshops, a woman came in and told us this story. She said her 8-year-old daughter came running home in a bathing suit from the community pool, and the mother remarked, "You're home early." The girl said, "Mommy, Mary and I were at the pool and this teenage boy played water tag with us, and it was so much fun, but then he said to me, 'Let's go in the bushes and I'll lick your toes and you'll like it.'" At this point the mother said to us that her heart just stopped as she waited to hear what would come next. It turned out that the daughter said, "It felt icky, I didn't like it, so I ran all the way home." And the mother (feeling very relieved!) said to her daughter, "Oh, it didn't feel right to you, and so your feelings told you what to do. You listened to your feelings."

Now, *that* is protection. Helping children trust themselves, listen to themselves, trust that gut feeling - certainly in today's world this is especially important.

What do you think makes it so hard for adults to respond in the ways you describe?

It's like having to erase a message on an old tape, the message that so many parents heard themselves when they were young: "What's wrong with you, how many times have I told you, the trouble with you is that you'll never learn ...". I think one of the reasons that our books have been so successful is that we don't lay a heavy guilt trip on parents. We've been there ourselves, we've been in the trenches, and we don't make parents feel bad or wrong because we know that whatever they do, even if it's not helpful, they do because it's what was done to them. So we're trying to help parents hear a new language as they're erasing the old.

The 20th anniversary edition of *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* is coming out in October, and one of the new chapters is full of letters from adults who have read the book or taken our workshops. They write about how they learned to give *themselves* a different message. If they lose their key, instead of saying, "Oh, I'm so stupid, I'll never learn," they say to themselves, "Oh, I wanted to put the key in a safe place, I meant to do it and I didn't, but I'll do it next time." They're learning to talk to themselves differently, and it's very moving to hear these stories of how, in treating their children with respect and caring, these parents are learning to treat themselves that way as well.

Sometimes when an approach focuses on the child's needs, the child's feelings, and so on, people will say, "Oh, that's a child-centered approach," as though the parents' feelings aren't part of it at all. But that's so different from what your books talk about.

Ours is a human-centered approach, based on the principle that parents and children are equal in dignity. Not in competence and experience but in dignity. And we recognize that it's impossible for a parent to handle every situation perfectly. I remember our teacher, Dr. Haim Ginott, saying to me, "Elaine, we aim for seventy percent, and sometimes fifty percent is as much as you can do – and there are times when it's only ten percent. But everything that we do that moves in this direction makes a big difference."

In our first book, *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children*, we devote chapters to parents' anger. We started out writing about what children need, and we found that we had to write the parent chapter first; we had to give to ourselves first. It's like when the flight attendants say, "Put the oxygen mask on yourself first." Nurture yourself first. Our approach isn't about "everything for the children." I remember doing a radio show on which a caller said, "I come home, I'm exhausted, and my kids want to play or they want me to listen to the story they wrote, but I'm so tired that even though I want to be with them, I don't feel up to it." I told her, "You can say, 'I want to play with you, but right now I've had a long day and I need a fifteen-minute shower and a chance to refresh myself. Then you can read me your story while I'm making dinner.'"

In other words, we can be as good to ourselves as we are to our children. Of course, there are times when, because they're children, their needs will take precedence. But it's important for children to know that parents have needs and feelings. The idea is, there are your feelings and my feelings and sometimes we want different things, so what can we do about it? Whenever we can, we try to involve children in the solution, and help them see that problems are not insurmountable, that when we put our heads together and work with good will, we can figure something out.

What is important to keep in mind when listening to children?

The first thing is simply to look at them. Very often, the child is saying, "Mommy, Mommy," and the mother is saying "Yes, I can hear you," while she's washing vegetables or whatever. Making eye contact is important. And if you can't listen at that moment, say, "I really want to hear you, but now is not a good time, my head is elsewhere," or "I want to finish this," and let them know when you'll be available.

Then, try to put yourself in the child's shoes and really listen; let the child talk without interrupting. Let the child express everything that happened and then reflect back what you understand the child was feeling. "All the kids laughed at me," says a child, and the parent reflects back, "That must have been really embarrassing." "Yeah, it was," the child says with relief at being understood. I find that the more we reflect, the more we will find out from the child. The more we acknowledge their inner reality, the more they will open up to us because there is a feeling of trust: someone is interested in how I feel and will accept all of my feelings. The unspoken message to the child is, "All of your feelings are OK. Your tears are as welcome as your smiles, your frustration is OK, your sadness is OK." Naturally, if a child is sad all the time, depressed, anxious, more investigation needs to be done, but I'm talking about the normal range of emotions.

I do want to stress, as we say repeatedly in the books, that accepting all feelings does not mean accepting all actions. People have said to us, "Isn't this a permissive approach?" It is, in one sense only: that we accept all feelings. But it's possible to acknowledge a feeling and yet limit the action: "I see you are mad at your brother, but knocking down his blocks is not OK."

What makes it hard for parents to listen? What gets in the way of accepting the child's feelings?

Anything the child says that makes us angry or anxious. If a child says, "I hate Grandma," the parent thinks, "That's not a nice thing to say." And if it's your own mother the child is talking about, it's even harder to hear. So it's important to have enough separation that you don't get infected by your child's feeling, even though this isn't easy.

If, instead of saying, "That's not nice," the mother reflects the child's feelings and says something like, "Oh boy, something Grandma did really bothered you;" then the child may well go on to say, "Yeah, every time she comes she only plays with the baby." "Oh, and you wanted her to play with you." "Yeah! And then she brings the baby a toy, and I want to play with it, but she tells me it's a baby toy."

Ours is a human-centered approach, based on the principle that parents and children are equal in dignity.

Now we know what's really going on. We have so much more information this way. With the other response, the conversation just stops, or the child just gets more and more upset. Now we're more able to be helpful: "Do you want me to tell Grandma, or should we tell her together?"

It's a matter of understanding that there are layers to what a child says, isn't it? That underneath that "I hate Grandma" may be more feelings and reasons and causes.

The layers come because often children don't really know what it is that's bothering them. So when we say, "Tell me what happened to make you so upset," they may not always know. It's more helpful to say, "I can see that *something* happened." Let the child talk. The more their feelings are acknowledged, the clearer they become about what's bothering them. And then the final step is: what to do about it? The child often comes up with a solution herself.

What if a child doesn't seem to want to talk?

The more the parent listens, the more trusting the child usually becomes. If a child comes home upset but doesn't want to talk about it, it can help for the parent to say, "Maybe I'm wrong but I'm getting a sense from the expression on your face that you didn't have a good time." And let the child go up to her room, if she doesn't want to talk. Or maybe just give a hug and say, "If you ever want to talk, I'll be here." Sometimes they won't take you up on the offer that day, but it'll come out on another day.

There certainly are some children who really don't want to talk or who dislike probing questions. If you say, "How was the party?" their feeling is, "Leave me alone, I've got my own life." Some children are simply more private and it's important to respect that while also letting them know what whatever they want to talk about, you'll listen. When you do have a chance to listen, that becomes the invitation for the child to talk more, because the child sees that there's a safe territory, that his parent is not going to jump down his throat the minute he raises an issue.

Do you think kids sometimes experiment to see if it is safe to talk about certain things?

Yes, they try a few times; they put up trial balloons to see if we're able to hear them. So they might say, "Mom, so-and-so says this happened," and then they'll listen to see how we react.

How would things look if the majority of adults responded to kids in this way you describe, that respects their dignity and accepts their feelings?

I think we'd have a safer world. I really do. I think we'd have a lot less acting out. I think children would begin [illegible] think in terms of solutions, and [illegible] think they would feel more trusting and more connected to other people. ◆

From *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk:*

Some children can tell you why they're frightened, angry, or unhappy. For many, however, the question "Why?" only adds to their problem. In addition to their original distress, they must now analyze the cause and come up with a reasonable explanation. Very often children don't know why they feel as they do. Other times they're reluctant to tell because they fear that in the adult's eyes, their reason won't seem good enough. ("For *that* you're crying?")

It's much more helpful for an unhappy youngster to hear, "I see something is making you sad," rather than to be interrogated with "What happened?" or "Why do you feel that way?" It's easier to talk to a grownup who accepts what you're feeling rather than one who presses you for explanations.

Every time a parent says to himself, "I sure muffed it that time. Why didn't I think to say ...," he automatically gets another chance. Life with children is open-ended. There's always another opportunity – later in the hour, day or week – to say, "I've been thinking about what you told me before, about those kids teasing you at the playground. And I realize now that must have been pretty upsetting."

Compassion is always appreciated, whether it comes sooner or later.

One mother told us about walking into the living room and seeing her ten-year-old daughter slumped on the sofa with tear-stained eyes. The mother sat down beside her, put her arms around her, murmured, "Something happened," and sat silently with her daughter for five minutes. Finally her daughter sighed and said, "Thanks, Mom. I'm better now." The mother never did find out what happened. All she knew was that her comforting presence must have been helpful, because an hour later she heard her daughter humming to herself in her room.

A teenager in one of our workshops told us that she came home one afternoon in a rage because her best friend had betrayed a very personal secret. She told her mother what had happened, and very matter-of-factly her mother commented, "You're angry." The girl said she couldn't help snapping back with a sarcastic, "No kidding."

We asked her what she would have liked her mother to say. She thought a while and answered, "It wasn't the words; it was how she said it. It was as if she was talking about the feelings of someone she didn't even care about. I guess I wanted her to show me that she was right in there with me. If she had just said something like,'Boy, Cindy, you must be *furious* at her!' then I would have felt she understood."

FOCUS

The Art of Listening

Parents write about the art of listening to children and of trying to understand what they're saying, even when they aren't speaking outright or directly.

They Want Something from Me

From Sherry Boas (FL):

There are times when I am alone in my office working on a project and enjoying a breath of solitude. I turn around and my couch and chairs, which minutes before were filled with only laundry waiting to be put away, now also hold the expectant bodies of my children. I have learned over the years that moments like these, when my children gravitate toward me, are too important to ignore. Those times are as potent to my parenting as Miracle Grow is to the garden. It makes our communication bloom.

So my project du jour goes on hold, I swivel my chair to face them, and we talk – often about nothing in particular but almost always about an important nothing-in-particular. The essential thing is that they initiated the interaction. They want something from me. My challenge is to figure out what. Are they in need of a project of their own? Are they struggling with a problem? Are they bored? Overworked? Tired? Achy? Hungry? Frustrated? Do they just need a hug or some extra attention? There are clues for each question, body language as well as some verbal language. And each child has different ways of communicating those needs.

Toby, our youngest at 7, is still refreshingly direct. He comes to me and speaks his mind: he wants me to play with him or fix him food or watch him play his computer game or see the castle he built down by the lake. These are simple and direct and easy needs to attend to.

Our three oldest are teenagers and their demands are more obtuse. For them I often need more time together spent in idle conversation, giving backrubs, doing hair brushing; taking drives to the store, and just lying around together and cuddling at night. Often it is only after those kinds of preliminaries that real issues appear and I can begin my work as guide.

Not all of our communicating comes out of those wanderings into my office. There are plenty of other times when "seize the moment" is the best approach. Sometimes our kids are just so receptive to input; those are the easy times. And sometimes I have important things to say and all I get is resistance. The dilemma then is to know when to pull back and when to continue trying to pursue a topic that the kids seem unwilling to discuss.

It is not always easy to know when to make suggestions and when to stay silent. It is difficult to judge how assertive to be in our children's lives. Should I push a child who seems bored into what I think would be a challenging and rewarding undertaking or should I wait until they ask to be directed? There are no easy answers or any one right answer. Each child must dictate his own needs and directions, leaving us parents with the immense task of interpreting their shrugs, sighs, and exasperated expressions and translating them into words.

Here are some important lessons I have learned in my quest to better understand my children's needs:

Verbal communication flows more easily when hands flow over bodies. Little children get lots of tender and playful touching. Big kids need that kind of contact too, as much as, if not more than, their younger siblings.

Be patient. It is often hard for me to see my kids do things at a completely different pace than I would do them, but I try to remember that I am not them and they are not me and they must find their own pace.

Expressing my own frustrations. When I get so upset because I can't figure out what is going on with one of my kids or when they don't seem to be paying any attention to important things I have said, I tell them how upsetting it is for me to feel that way. Learning to express my own exasperation in an urgent yet non-threatening tone is essential to our successful communicating.

Being available. Turning away from the keyboard, book, or whatever occupation has my interest and turning toward my kids – not always but often enough so that they have no doubt that I care. They should know they are more important than the TV, stock market, garden, or creative project I am working on. Of course, I know they are more important but they might not know it if they see me always putting them second to the task at hand.

Saying "I love you." Often and spontaneously.

Looking for the good and complimenting that, instead of focusing on what they are doing wrong.

By doing all these things I find my communication with my children to be more pleasure than problem. Spending time with my kids is one of my greatest joys, and being able to talk to them, knowing they want to talk to me, gives me an incredible sense of pride and contentment.

Understanding a Toddler's Cues

From Andy Migner (MA):

Sometimes I'm slower than I would like to be when it comes to picking up on my children's signals that they need help or that something isn't working for them. The good news is that if I don't get it the first time, they will keep cueing me until I do. My oldest son taught me this when he was a toddler.

For me, he first few years of my children's lives have been on-the-job training programs in discerning and responding to non-verbal cues. My eldest, being a late-talking boy, extended and intensified this period of training. I recall a particularly grueling six months or so when Christopher was 1 1/2 – 2, when over and over again I failed to accurately "hear" what he was trying to tell me.

At a playground, playgroup, or library story hour, Christopher would find a lovely little girl about his age and grab hold of her (usually long blonde) hair at the top of her head and not let go. The first few times this happened, I was shocked. While it was obviously a hurtful thing to do, I could tell that his intention was not unkind. In fact, his "victim" was usually someone he liked. This behavior made no sense to me. His grip was so tight that it took time and effort to pry open his fingers and by the time he did, the little girl would be wailing. Though I was firm with Christopher, telling him firmly that this hurt and was not allowed, many parents banished us with their glares. Others advised angrily that I should pull my son's hair like that so he could see how it feels. I wanted to help my son manage his feelings and get along with others and I was under the mistaken notion that all of these social activities would help him learn to do so. In addition, I found it extremely uncomfortable to be perceived as "Hitler's mother."

After the first few incidents, wherever we went I stayed hot on Christopher's trail and kept a special eye out for sweet long-haired toddling blondes, to intervene before his fingers engaged. But once or twice I was not quick enough. After prying him loose, strongly admonishing him for his behavior, and apologizing to the girl and her parent, I would leave whatever activity we were at and take Christopher home.

On one such drive home, I was quietly crying in frustration and embarrassment. I looked over at him in his car seat where he sat happy and contented. Suddenly it hit me. He *wanted* to go home.

"Christopher," I asked, "Did you want to stay at the park?" He shook his head no.

"Did you want to go home?" He vigorously nodded his head up and down.

"Was it too noisy? Too many kids?" Again he nodded yes.

I was so relieved to finally get it. Convoluted and indirect as it was, it made sense. These incidents only happened in group situations. It was his way of telling me that it was too much for him. More than that, it was his way of ensuring that he got what he needed – taken home.

"Christopher," I said, "next time when it feels too crowded or it's not fun anymore, come to me and say 'home.'" He was beginning at this point to say some one-word sentences and thsi was one that I knew he could say.

Two weeks later we were at a very crowded library story hour (I told you I was slow). Christopher had managed to get a seat in the front row, but when the librarian would not let him sit next to her or in her lap, he lost interest and wandered off. I followed him with my eyes, hesistant to disturb the crowd by getting up in the middle of the story. My heart stopped when I saw him, his hand trembling over a lovely long blonde head of hair. He looked at me desperately as if he was using every ounce of his energy to resist the urge to grab hold. I bolted across the room, no longer worried about disturbing anyone. I gently but quickly took his hand in mine and swept him into my arms. Into his ear I whispered, "You want to go home?" He nodded yes. In the blink of an eye we were out of there.

I was very moved by Christopher's valiant two-year-old effort to control his impulses and yet signal me of his need. His effort finally drove home to me his overall message that groups in general were over-stimulating for him. I shifted our activities accordingly.

My children are all older now and quite articulate about what does and doesn't work for them. However, when they are feeling uncomfortable but do not yet know why, their behavior, not their words, will tell me that something is up. My children's cues are very individual. One of my children is very quiet and his cues are subtle. But they each had their period of being my "training director" (during those early pre-verbal days) and these present-day experiences help to keep me attuned to their unique needs and temperaments. Under the expert tutelage of my children, my listening skills have improved and I have become quicker to pick up on their non-verbal signals. But when their signals get by me, I have found Christopher's original teaching to be consistently true. I need never worry about missing cues. They will patiently (exhaustively, if necessary) continue to signal me until I take notice.

A Balancing Act

From Lorraine Hoyt (ME):

For me, listening is at the heart of what I do rather than teaching my children. I see my role more as the one who helps them keep their balance. Given that balance, they are able to learn what they need and want to learn.

With my first born, my daughter Joanna, the listening was at least clear and simple because she was so verbal and so fascinated with the shadings of meaning in words. She was the child who asked me, when she was 3 and I was annoyed about something, if I was really furious or just a little irritated. The biggest problem was getting any respite from listening, as she wanted to tell me everything. I remember going on walks with her when she was around 10 and wishing we could just be quiet some of the time, but she would talk non-stop. She has told me recently that back then, as she began to realize that I sometimes withdrew my thoughts to a private place where she couldn't follow, she kept up a desperate sort of chatter to keep me with her. Now she is 17 and we have a comfortable mix of speech and silence that works very well for both of us, but I wish I had understood what she was doing back then; perhaps I could have reassured her.

My son Zachary is four years younger and an altogether different sort of child. When he was very small he used to bite his sister in frustration over that endless flow of words with which he could not compete. He insisted he was so mad he had to bite something, and I insisted he couldn't bite his sister (or anybody else). I had to hear his frustration, sympathize with his feeling of helplessness, and set an acceptable boundary. The solution was a doll made from a sock that he called "biter guy" and carried about in his mouth for several months whenever he was very frustrated before he outgrew the need for it.

But still I often felt at a loss with him, not knowing what he felt or wanted. After one child who talked incessantly and minutely about her hopes and feelings, I had a hard time adjusting to one who didn't deal with emotions verbally and didn't say directly what he wanted for fear of being disappointed. Repetition or intense emotion in any communication to him upset him. I had to learn to correct him in what was for me an artificially matter-of-fact tone of voice. Although Joanna had occasionally stomped up the stairs shouting that she hated me and I was the worst mother in the world, I felt confident of the connection with her. Zachary was very polite if he was displeased with me, or his eyes began to tear up and he went to his room. Joanna needed to talk when upset and Zachary needed to be left alone.

At first I needed to learn to respect that need and to leave him alone against all my instincts. And then I had to teach him to be able to talk – later, or some of the times, but nonetheless to talk. In the last couple of years I've been better able to explain to him that talking is part of being connected and living with other people. I used to be too careful, afraid of intruding and not trusting the strength of our relationship enough to push. That has been a balancing act for me, but it has been important not to just back off and leave him alone, and I can see that he is happier and more comfortable since I've begun pushing more for words. I just need to wait until his emotions are less overwhelming and to keep my words to him as level and matter-of-fact as I can.

The listening is complicated not only by the differences between my two children but by my memories of how my parents talked to and listened to me. I can sometimes hear the child I was in my children's voices and hear the words of my mother coming out of my mouth. No wonder it is hard to keep in balance. But the odd part is that in this sense I identify more with my son, feel more what he is feeling as I remember my parents telling me that they just didn't understand me. And Joanna, to whom I feel so connected and whom I hear in many ways so clearly, is not at all like me in how she relates to her mother.

Perhaps because I still hear my parents' voices so clearly, I get very upset when I hear adults tell children that they don't really feel what they feel, don't really want what they say they want. To me it is so important to hear the child – not necessarily to give them what they want or let them act inappropriately because of their feelings, but to hear and acknowledge them. So I won't say, "Of course you're not mad about such a silly little thing." The saying at our house is "I know you're mad but you can't bite your sister."

One tool we've found helpful for listening is playing Ungame. It is a non-competitive board game with the simple rule that no one can talk during another player's turn unless asked a direct question. There are question cards that come with the game as well as opportunities for players to ask their own questons or make comments, and spaces that ask whether the player is feeling certain emotions. I bought it when Zach was quite young and had trouble keeping up with conversations and getting time to have a say. He very much liked the idea that during his turn no one else could speak unless he asked them a question. We used it for a while and then he seemed more able to hold his own and it was put away. He is now 13 and we've recently had it out and found it again useful and fun. We also sometimes use *The Book of Questions* in a similar manner while riding in the car. I think for him it helps to have that sort of structure or permission to discuss some things.

I've never been comfortable with the notion that I could know for sure what someone was trying to hide. But when I said earlier that I help the children keep their balance, what I meant was helping them figure out what they mean and creating a space in which they can say it. And most of all, teaching them to begin doing this for themselves. When Zach was little, he used to get grouchy in the late afternoon. He may have had a good lunch and a snack and when I asked if he was hungry, he was apt to say no. But I noticed that if I give him a "sneak-ahead" – a snack – while I was preparing supper, he got over his grouches. So it turned out that he was hungry after all. As he gets older, he is better at recognizing his irritability as hunger and getting something to eat.

This sort of listening is central to my ideas of raising children: first for me to figure out when something is wrong and then for me to help the children be able to figure it out for themselves. How many times have I reminded Zach that while you can't always get what you want, it helps the odds tremendously if you know what it is and ask for it? Too many times, I'm sure, as he is my child who doesn't like all that repetition.

What Her Frustration Meant

From Deb Shell (VT):

When our children were growing up, I shied away from children's classes that taught general concepts and I avoided formats that seemed to suppose children needed a special structure to learn what they *seemed* to be learning just fine from everyday experiences. We took a more laissez-faire approach, which satisfied both our philosophical ideals and my personality.

This worked out pretty well until, at age 11, one of my children became more and more unsettled and restless. She cried a lot and her temper was short. The routines that had suited us well enough no longer satisfied her. She was able to tell me she was unhappy, which we could clearly see was true, but she was unable to say how I or her father could help her relieve her increasing frustration and sadness.

I don't remember how we thought of what to try – if it was her idea or mine, or a suggestion from a friend – but we hit on finding mentors and teachers outside of our family, from whom she might learn how to do some things she longed to do. This was how I had to frame her desire to explore beyond our family and friendship groups, because it seemed threatening to my overall homeschooling philosophy to have a child who seemed to *need* this exposure; if it was related to a specific goal, it was easier for me to accept it.

What I realize now is that I hadn't known she longed for this; I hadn't been attuned enough to recognize her need until it became a malaise I couldn't ignore. Probably because we were so self-reliant and thrifty, as well as suspicious of children's classes, it hadn't occurred to any of us that a specialty class could easily provide an appropriate venue for my child's emergent need.

When I told my oldest child that her sister was going to take drawing classes every Tuesday, she blurted out, "But we don't do classes!" She spoke as if we were breaking a commandment. That's when I realized how rigidly children and parents can interpret a philosophy, and lose sight of the many options that may provide another way to reach a goal.

Although this was a turning point in our lives, I continued to harbor fears about the influence of the classes my daughters chose. It's funny now to realize how little any of it mattered, in terms of the actual classes they were drawn to. Three of my four daughters loved dance classes so much that they sought dance for a career, and gave that much more attention and focus to their endeavor. I would fret that I hadn't offered them science classes, only art, dance, and music, and I thought maybe I'd neglected to introduce them to other options that might have affected their choice for careers. Years later, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is so clear to me that the particular subject that interests a child doesn't matter, except that it represents a piece of the child's overall burgeoning self, which really takes a lifetime to blossom fully.

Although only a college junior, my second daughter is at this moment, by invitation, studying molecular biology in a graduate level genetics class at Smith College. So much for too much ballet and no science classes growing up.

Even though it took an unhappy child to teach us this lesson, those first attempts at outside-the-family classes added the necessary freedom for us to refrain from making value judgments about how any of us would satisfy our needs to learn new things.

Kids Remember Mother's Guesses

From Ruth Matilsky (NJ):

I asked my three oldest children to think about times when I have helped them by figuring out what they were saying even when they weren't speaking directly. My oldest, Sara, now 19, remembered something I said when she was preparing for her cross-country bike trip two years ago. When she was about a month away from leaving, I found her getting very angry at her siblings. Her tolerance level with them was below zero, and at first it didn't make much sense to me. Then I started paying a little more attention, and I began hearing that she was also saying, "I'm going to be gone a long time, and I'm going to *miss* you." I wondered about that because she was getting so annoyed with her brothers and sister at the same time. Finally I put the two together and I told her that I thought she should ask herself why she was so angry. I said that sometimes it is hard to say goodbye, and so instead of facing that she was soon going to be leaving her family, maybe she was getting angry at us so that she could say to herself, "Good, I'm leaving them soon and I won't miss them."

I was really guessing here, but I guess I hit it right on target. I had forgotten about it, but it made a deep impression on Sara, as I found out when we talked about it recently.

When Sara was about 13, our homeschooling group exploded when some of the members became upset about including within the group some medically fragile children who might have AIDS. It was an awful time for us as we saw our carefully nurtured community begin to fall apart. One of Sara's closest friends no longer wanted to see her anymore because our families were on opposite sides of the issue. I worried a lot about Sara having friends, and I urged her to get to know some homeschoolers who lived a half an hour away. It was my idea that she could take the bus to see them. I thought that she wanted this, and I really pushed it.

I was absolutely wrong that time. Sara didn't feel nearly as strongly about the friendship with these girls as I thought she did, and she was absolutely not ready to do bus travel on her own. She went once and was so upset about taking the bus that it ruined the visit. This was a classic situation of me feeling Sara's pain so much that I thought I knew exactly what she should do, but I didn't.

What Sara did do was to hang out with one of the younger women in our community who had small children. I was so upset about the whole situation and so hung up on children having to have friends exactly their own age that it got in the way of my listening well. I didn't realize that what Sara needed was a more mature friend outside her family. She needed someone she could rely on who was not dealing with "teenage issues."

I asked my next oldest, Jake, whether he thought there were times when I had zeroed in on his feelings. He didn't really answer the question directly. He said, "Mom, you and I are so much alike that you want to give me advice, because when something is happening with me you can remember when it happened with you and you want to save me from making mistakes. Mom, let people know that you have to let your kids make their own mistakes."

Let your kids make their own mistakes. That is exactly what I used to say to my father, but I screamed it at him because we had a different kind of relationship.

This was a classic situation of me feeling Sara's pain so much that I thought I knew exactly what she should do, but I didn't.

Finally, when I asked April (now 13), she said, "You know that something is happening with me when I give you a *hint.*" April really does tend to keep things more to herself and not let on when she is upset. Even when I notice that there is something disturbing her, I find that she is slower to talk about it when I ask her what is going on. I think that perhaps she needs to process things more before she shares her feelings with me.

On the other hand, she has come to me over the years and used me for a sounding board when she has had a difficulty that she needed to work through. There was one time several years ago when she was taking a class with a friend and was disturbed by the friend's attitude to the teacher and the teacher's children. The friend was being disrespectful behind their backs and was urging April to join her in her nastiness. April had to deal with loyalty issues in attempting to figure out the appropriate response to her friend. She didn't want to "tell," but she wanted the behavior to end. We must have talked for weeks about possible ways to deal with this and the ramifications of every conceivable plan. My job through all this was to come up with possibilities without pushing them down her throat, and also to keep my mouth shut around all the involved parents. That was harder than you might suspect, but I did it. I think that talking it over and puzzling it out with me helped April deal with the consequences of her actions.

Staying Close to Teenagers

From Orese Fahey (NM):

I have three daughters, ages 12, 14, and 17. When they were little, it was pretty easy to understand what was going on with them. They did not hesitate to state how they were feeling, what their needs were, what they liked and disliked. If they didn't give a verbal cue, it was very easy to interpret their facial expressions and body language. As they have become teenagers, I would have expected them to become more adept at expressing themselves in words, and this is true, to some extent. But the challenge has been to get them to do it! When they were younger, they would spontaneously express their feelings: "I don't like this book!" "I'm mad at so-and-so because she took my toy" and so on. Now that they're older I have had to become much more adept at reading subtle cues: a sullen expression, or more-silent-than-usual stretch, someone rolling her eyes upward.

Our middle daughter, Ravenna, has been studying violin with the same teacher for seven years. She came home from her violin lesson one afternoon and I asked, as I always do, "How was your lesson?" She likes her teacher a lot and enjoys playing violin, so usually her anwer is, "It was good" or "I'm having trouble with such-and-such piece, but David helped me with it." This time she burst into tears and told me that there was a piece she'd been struggling with for weeks and she just couldn't get it. And that her teacher had asked her if she had trouble reading and had even said, "Maybe you have a learning disability."

She was devastated. She didn't ask me for help directly, but I felt that I needed to act swiftly. After she had calmed down a bit, I discussed several options with her. I felt that the most important thing was to assure her that it was not acceptable for her teacher to insult her by suggesting she had a learning disability just because she was having trouble mastering one piece. I told her she could tell him she was devastated by his remark and didn't want him to be her teacher anymore, or she could tell him she was devastated by his remark and ask for an apology and work it out with him, or she could just pretend it didn't happen and go back to the next lesson (of course I didn't recommend this option), or she could just quit taking lessons. I felt that it was important for her to feel she had a choice and did not have to feel stuck in the situation simply because he is the only violin teacher she has ever had. We talked both about other violin teachers in town and about her longstanding relationship with this teacher and how it has always been a good one up to this point.

As we talked, she regained her self-confidence. I told her over and over that she does not have a learning disability and that her teacher must have made the comment because he was getting frustrated over his inability to explain the tempo in a way in which she could get it. She decided that she didn't want to quit violin lessons, she didn't want to find another teacher, and she wanted to keep working with this teacher, whom she really loves, if a satisfactory solution could be found.

Normally, I would have encouraged her to call the teacher and discuss it with him, but under the circumstances I felt it was important for me to be her advocate, and also I wanted to hear the teacher's side of the story for myself. He was stunned when I reported that Ravenna was so upset. He had no idea that his remark, which he made out of frustration and half-jokingly, had had such an effect on her. He felt terrible. Solutions were found, and Ravenna felt very satisfied with her decision to continue with her teacher.

An interesting postscript is that both her teacher and I were upset about Ravenna's upset for days, yet I observed that Ravenna recovered from this emotional trauma in a few hours. I have observed that some emotionally devastating events blow through my teenage daughters like storms, and it's important for me not to get too caught up in their ups and downs, which I may sometimes take more seriously than they do.

It seems to me that "listening to kids" has two distinct parts: there is the actual listening and then there is what you do with the information you take in. My husband and I listen to the girls talk about their siblings, friends, employers, teachers, coaches, teammates, love interests, music groups, movies – this is what is hashed over as we prepare breakfast together, sit at dinner, and drive around town. Teens feel quite independent and resist a whole lot of parental input. You have to be sensitive as to when they want a suggestion from you, when they just want you to listen sympathetically, and when they don't feel like communicating and want to be left alone.

I used to think my oldest daughter was deliberately keeping us in the dark about what she was thinking and feeling, so from time to time I would question her: "You seem angry; what is going on with you these days?" We would sit through long silences and then she would say, "I don't know" or something equally non-revealing. It finally dawned on me that she wasn't trying to keep something from me; she really didn't know. So I suggested that she get in the habit of writing in a journal every day, so she could converse with herself on paper and find out what she was thinking and feeling (a practice I began as an adolescent and which continues to be very helpful to me; I think it was Auden who said, "If I don't write, how do I know what I think?"). I also insisted that she write a letter to her dad and me once a week, just filling us in on what she was doing, thinking, and feeling. That has worked fantastically. She can definitely express on paper what she can't sort through and express orally right now. It's a safe way for her to communicate and we feel happy getting her weekly letters because we don't feel like we're stuck with guessing how she is feeling.

Example number three involves our youngest daughter. I have found that when I am working with her in a workbook, on a crossword, on a math problem, etc., she quite often says, "This is boring." Now, if I think it is boring too, I say, "You're right," and we drop it and look for something more enjoyable to do. However, I have realized that a lot of times, her "I'm bored" really means "This is too hard." In those cases, I say, "I'm sorry you're bored. Let's just work on this a little longer, though." If I help her work through the hard part, she often becomes engaged and interested again and we go all the way to the end of the project.

Communication in families is a fascinating and complex subject. Because we spend so much time together, we become very sensitive to every gesture, nuance, tone of voice. Even though we know and read each other so well, it is very important *not* to assume that we always know what is going on. We frequently stop the action and take time to converse, or write to one another, so that we can explain what we are thinking and feeling, what our expectations are, and what our frustrations and disappointments are.

Interpreting "I Don't Know"

From Debbie Westheimer (OH):

Most often when my daughter Hannah (12) is offered an activity, her response is "I don't know." This is true especially if we offer her something she hasn't done before. Her father and I have had to figure out ways to respond to her "I don't know" and to understand what else she may be saying indirectly through that expression.

I think Hannah's "I don't know" is often an indirect way of expressing her concerns about the proposed activity. I'm aware that she has more risks than many 12-year-olds when taking on many activities. Her "I don't know" may be an indirect way of asking, "Will there be reading out loud?" or "Will I fit in with the rest of the group?" Hannah sometimes comes across words she doesn't know, and her reading isn't always fluid, so the thought of having to read aloud in public situations is scary to her. As for her social concerns, she tends to be on the reserved, shy end of the scale, so this too means that she sometimes wories about group activities.

Likely the best service I can provide as a parent is to understand what worries are lurking behind her "I don't know." Then, rather than discounting them, I can help her break down the "I don't know" into specific concerns.

This is not to say that Hannah would not try an activity if it required reading aloud or if she did not know anyone in the group. I'm reminded of my kids' response when I announce their appointment with our pediatrician for an annual checkup. "Will I get a shot?" they ask. I call the office and check it out. Likewise, it's helpful for Hannah if we can take the time to figure out what information is important to her to help her make a decision or just to help her prepare for an activity that is coming up. I use the example of a shot because I think for some kids, deciding to put themselves in situations they perceive as risky is painful or hard, like a needle under the skin.

> **I think Hannah's "I don't know" is often an indirect way of expressing her concerns about the proposed activity. ... Likely the best service I can provide is to understand what worries are lurking behind her "I don't know."**

Here are some examples. This past winter, Hannah was invited to join a young girls' choral group, and she deliberated for many weeks about whether or not she would participate. Dick and I have to be careful about showing too much enthusiasm, or else I'm afraid that Hannah will say yes only to please us. In this case, Dick and I were genuinely enthuasiastic about the possibilty of Hannah's working with a talented director and being part of a trial run young girls singing group. After talking with one another, we came to the conclusion that Hannah's "I don't know" was based mostly on her personal opinion of her singing abilities. She does not consider herself a singer. We were familiar with two other groups that Dr. Catherine Roma had directed so we were able to assure Hannah that this director's choruses had a range of abilities and that the most important part in any group is one's commitment. Also, in this deliberation stage, Hannah got a phone call from a friend in our homeschool network encouraging her to come.

She never did say, "Oh well, since I don't have to be a singer and since Lily will be there, I'd like to go." It was more that since we were able to understand what her concerns were and to offer her information in response to those concerns, my husband Dick then felt comfortable suggesting that she try it out. We have since asked her if she was glad she joined the choir, and her response was again that she doesn't know and isn't sure if she'd do it again.

But there have been activities that have turned into clear positive experiences for her as well. Two winters ago I signed us both up for downhill skiing lessons. Her "I don't know" turned into tears of fear when she had to sign a contract stating she would ski most responsibly and when she realized that skiing had dangers as great as death. Once again, we helped break down the "I don't know" into separate parts by taking the time to listen to Hannah's concerns about her abilities. Though no one else had the expectation that Hannah would come to the slopes already knowing how to ski, Hannah felt hesitant to participate in a sport with which she had no experience. She was scared she wouldn't be able to ski and scared that she would appear foolish in front of her peers. Again, Hannah never did say, "Yes, I will do it," even after I had listened to her concerns. This time it was me who signed us both up. I really wanted to try it out (it was my first time too) and I really wanted a "date" with Hannah away from her younger siblings. She complied by allowing me to take her, and she ended up loving it and returned the following winter.

Recently we offered Hannah the opportunity to attend a residential soccer camp. She has been involved in soccer for about six years, and she is tough, smart, and fast but she does not have ball handling skills. We know she wants to improve and her older brother had a good experience at camp. Hannah deliberated a long time on this offer.

Often in such cases, I start by making a statement: "Sounds like you have some worries about soccer camp." Then she can tell me if I'm wrong (which is always a possibility) or she can go through the door I've opened. This time her "I don't know" contained two concens: "I won't know anyone" and "What if I'm not as good as everyone else?" In the end it was Hannah who decided yes – her desire to improve won over her two concerns.

Two Very Different Children

From P.A.T. Hunt (NY):

A challenge for me when it comes to listening has been recognizing that what I got accustomed to with my first child, Selina, would not always serve me in my relationship with her younger brother, Martin. Selina took command of language at an early age, articulating, connecting spoken words with their meanings, writing them out, copying whole books before sounding out words and reading pages of them. Words worked for her. She had an ease with them, a comfort using and applying them in different situations.

Martin's early years were quiet, sensitive, reflective, all with little speech. This constrast with his sister was alarming for some members of our extended family. When Martin finally began to form words, they were difficult to understand, a frustration for us all. That was partly because he replaced l's with r's and invented his own words for things. So we found it helpful sometimes to rely on our intuition and other times rely on Selina as an interpreter (she had an easier time figuring out what Martin was saying).

We didn't always get it right relying on Martin's non-verbal cues. I'd like to think these instances of our misunderstanding him demonstrated to him that language had some importance. Gradually, he increasingly and more clearly sounded out words to communicate.

Another difference was that learning outside the home came early for Selina. When she was 3 and 4 years old, she told us that she wanted to attend a parents' cooperative that met three mornings a week. At this age she also liked the idea of studying Suzuki cello, then violin and later piano. Martin, on the other hand, preferred individual play dates to being part of an organized playgroup. Then, when he was about 7, a friend of ours invited him to an arts and crafts class she was starting in her home. I thought he'd be interested. He said he wasn't. I wanted to honor his words, to accept his refusal, but I was having difficulty with it. It seemed to counter activities I knew he enjoyed. Then I realized he was saying no to something he had little information about. We talked, and he consented to go and visit the space where the classes would be held, get an idea of the projects that were planned, and find out who else would be there. Once he had that information, he decided in favor of going and did so for two years. I learned that sometimes he needed more information before making a decision or feeling comfortable.

Martin also waited a while before taking our suggestion when it came to music. When he was 5, he saw his uncle playing an acoustic guitar and was fascinated with it. Not too long after that, his uncle gave him a 3/4 guitar and he played it regularly, figuring things out for himself. Another uncle gave Martin a hollow-body electric guitar. The amplified sound appealed to Martin and he continued playing by ear the tunes he knew.

During this time, we offered him guitar lessons. He wasn't interested. In this case, I didn't ask him to get more information because I got the sense that he was forming a relationship with the guitar and didn't want anyone else interfering with it. We asked him to let us know if and when he felt differently about taking lessons. After a few years of self-teaching, Martin was open to our suggestion to study music theory with a friend whose instruments are upright and electric bass and piano. This instruction gave way to a recommendation that Martin study with an electric guitarist. That was almost four years ago. Since then Martin, now playing a Fender Stratocaster he bought with money he earned, meets each week with his music teacher and they make music.

Each of our children has had a particular way of interacting with the world and we have had to learn to listen and respond to both. Selina's way helped our confidence as first-time homeschooling parents and allowed us to trust Martin's way.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

From Ronder Thomas Young (GA):

When my oldest son William was 16, he told me he had decided to drop the Japanese language class he had been taking at a local community college. It was a special program that required mostly independent study supplemented by two weekly 90-minute drill sessions with native speakers. William loved these classes and devoted an enormous amount of time to them, and progressed through both quarters of beginning Japanese and the first quarter of Intermediate Japanese with few problems. The explanation he offered me for dropping the class was that – due to reorganization that had occurred when the college changed from the quarter system to the semester system – he had missed an essential lesson and the new instructor seemed oblivious or, at the very least, unsympathetic to the difficulties the change posed.

Although I was surprised at William's decision, given the passion and intensity with which he had pursued his study of the language, his plan seemed reasonable under the circumstances. I told him to do what he thought best, but I did advise him to wait the seven days until the deadline for dropping classes.

After his first drill session that next week, I asked William if it was getting any easier. "No," he laughed. "She thinks we're a bunch of slackers." He shrugged. "It just seems she always comes up with something I haven't gotten to yet."

His laugh confused me a bit. Clearly, that day's class hadn't left him miserable and the difficulties hadn't sapped his interest.

"So are you getting to some of it?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "I'll keep going even if I drop the class."

"Maybe it'll go better if you don't have to deal with this overly critical instructor."

"Well," he said, "she can't lower her standards just because they overhauled the system."

As he was countering every comment I made, I considered that perhaps I hadn't understood our earlier conversation as well as I had thought.

I asked him if he still enjoyed studying Japanese and if the class's drill sessions helped at all. He said yes and that it would be a lot harder without them. Perhaps, I thought, I hadn't understood at all. "Then why exactly do you want to drop the class?"

"I don't know what kind of grade I'll end up with," he said. "It sure won't be another A."

I was flabbergasted. For the great majority of his life, William's learning had been completely devoid of grades. It had never occurred to me that his decision would be based on anything other than a personal passion or goal. "So what?" I asked. Had one year of taking community college classes and accumulating a numerical assessment of his performance perverted his integrity?

Of course not. I should have known better. It turned out he wanted to maintain his 4.0 for very practical reasons. In a couple of months, he would be sending out college applications. Given the absence of grades in the bulk of his nontraditional education, he thought that the ones he did have should indicate the seriousness of his scholarship. Further, although homeschooled students are not immediately eligible for Georgia's Hope Scholarship, he was on track to have completed 30 semester hours with the requisite "B" average by the time he entered college as a freshman, which would make him eligible for the scholarship.

I made assumptions based on history and partial information. The follow-up questions were what allowed me – and William – to get to the heart of what we were really talking about.

Still I said, "So what?" He had achieved such a good record so far, and even with a bad grade in this class he'd still maintain his scholarship eligibility. And if the scholarship and admissions people couldn't appreciate a student taking on a challenge and doing the best he could with it, then they weren't worthy of their positions.

I think that reassurance from me was all William needed to keep plugging away at Japanese. I came to understand that the grade, as an artificial measure of his life and learning, was not his concern at all. Rather he was, perhaps for the first time, including the whole family's welfare in his decision-making. He was thinking of his plan to attend college and the financial obligations that would entail.

He persevered and did end up getting an A in the class. Meanwhile, I realized that no matter how close I am to my children and how many years I've spent listening to their words, observing their actions, and anticipating their needs, I should never get so comfortable in this intimacy that I *hear* what has not *actually* been said. William had not been attempting to be indirect with me when he first brought up the idea of dropping Japanese class; he gave direct, rational reasons. A mistake was almost made, however, because I made assumptions based on history and partial information. The follow-up questions were what allowed me – and William – to get to the heart of what we were really talking about.

I do not think, however, that it is always necessary to pounce into questioning as soon as I'm struck that there may be something out of the ordinary rhythm. Our question-and-answer session occurred a few days after I had assured William that he should do whatever he thought best. It may have been in those few days that he fully realized himself what his real concern was, and that concern may have surprised him as much as it did me. I think a period of patient silence is greatly underestimated as a communication tool. For one thing, it keeps a healthy balance between the parties, allowing both of them the option of initiating a conversation.

Last fall, my middle son, Alec, who was then 15, and I were on the Parent/Teen panel at the GWS conference. One of the questions that Susannah, as moderator, asked the teenagers was what role their parents played in their life and learning. Alec answered that he looked to me for guidance, but he added, "Academically, now, I try to do most of my work on my own, and try to see how that works out. Just me doing it by myself ... writing things by myself ... to learn to trust myself a little bit more ... and not be so concerned with my Mom."

His wonderfuly articulate statement both surprised and enlightened me. It surprised me because that was not at all the way we had worked on writing up until that time. Both William and Alec had always discussed their writing ideas, almost paragraph by paragraph, with me, and the editing process had always been an active, side-by-side affair. In fact, they had always touted this methodology as a great way to understand style and grammar.

Alec's answer enlightened me because it explained some recent behavior I'd been puzzling over privately. The summer before the GWS panel, Alec was working on some essays for a distance learning history course in which he had enrolled. Periodically, I asked him how they were coming along, and his answers seemed uncharacteristically curt and coy. "Why?" he would ask, or "I'm doing it," he would say.

Although I continued, from time to time, out of curiosity, to inquire how it was going down there at his desk, I didn't persist or question him about his defensive stance. I did theorize that perhaps he set too many goals for what he was going to accomplish over the summer, and perhaps he was frustrated. Alec is highly ambitious and energetic and almost always gives the appearance of taking on much more than one person can reasonably accomplish. One reason I backed off, however, is that he also almost always seems to find a sane way to prioritize and meet his goals.

His answer on the panel, however, clarified for me that he was not practicing some sort of vague avoidance technique but rather deliberately choosing a new way of working. About two weeks after we returned home from the conference, Alec presented me with all eight of his history essay answers and asked me if I would proofread and offer suggestions. For all intents and purposes, however, they were finished.

Since then he has continued to write in this way, in solitude and then asking me to read his work when he's finished. He has said that he finds this a more efficient way to proceed, because he's not constantly second-guessing himself as he tries to hammer out a first draft. I understand this because, unlike like some of the writers I know who constantly have someone else reading their works-in-progress, I too am more comfortable getting through the early drafts in solitude and then getting a response.

Although I would certainly have understood if Alec had told me earlier just exactly what he said on the panel, I speculated that our past working relationship may have made it more difficult to articulate that in private. What I thought came out marvelously wise and thoughtful on the panel may have felt, to him, like a silly thing to say in private – as if he would be childishly covering his paper and demanding, "Don't look!"

Or perhaps he thought he had already told me when he said simply, "I'm doing it," and I didn't yet have the knowledge to understand. If the panel had not expedited our discussion on this subject, I suspect a question-and-answer session similar to the one William and I had about the Japanese class would have eventually taken place, but I'm happy his decision came out in the forthright, fully formed way that it did.

Listening to my children clearly has the practical effect of making homeschooling and family life richer and more efficient. Ultimately, though, I listen to my children not because of concern or duty – which as a parent I am bound to possess – but rather because of my blatant curiosity and keen interest in who they are and what they have to say and what's happening in their hearts and minds. ◆

And the Skylark Sings with Me

We are pleased to be publishing David Albert's book *And the Skylark Sings with Me* this fall. The book is a father's account of one family's homeschooling, of the growth and development of their two young daughters, and of the ways in which the family draws upon the resources of the community. In his foreword to the book, Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *Magical Child*, writes:

> David Albert gives us, with unpretentious clarity and admirable economy, as profound an insight into the development of intelligence in children as is to be found in many a ponderous professional tome.

One of the common questions homeschooling parents get asked is, "But how will you be able to teach algebra?" (or physics or whatever the questioner thinks is beyond the capabilities of the average parent). Here's an excerpt from the book in which David Albert addresses this question:

A partial list of [my daughter] Ali's interests and my own initial ignorance, semi-ignorance, or lack of experience at the time these interests arose is telling. In no particular order:

- The violin, western music theory, and choral music: I'd never, in my entire life, touched a violin or viola or cello. I played the saxophone in elementary school. I hadn't sung in a choir in 25 years.
- Snakes and reptiles: I'd never touched a snake, though I'd seen them at the zoo. I once dissected a frog, and the sight of its intestines gave me bad dreams.
- Wolves and wildlife ecology: I grew up in New York City, so enough said.
- Botany: Ditto. I knew the difference between deciduous, evergreen, and palm trees. To this day I possess a white thumb: anything I plant is likely to turn to ash.
- Modern Darwinian genetics: I took biology 30 years ago, before students widely used electron microscopes, and hadn't read anything since except in the course of my current employment in public health.
- Opera and the Italian language: I like opera, but hadn't attended one in over a decade, and did not listen to any. I once knew Latin ...
- Mythology: I actually did some graduate work, but hadn't pursued anything in 20 years.
- Music composition: Zip.
- Weaving: I seem to remember making a potholder in first grade.

[Our younger daughter] Meera adds two items to the list:

- Piano playing: no experience whatsoever, and I'm envious.
- Gymnastics: physical education is the only subject I ever got close to flunking in school.

... The constant challenge for us and for our children lay ... in finding new ways to access our community, its people, and its resources. In reality, the success of our approach to homeschooling is critically dependent on it.

... When utilizing the community as a flexible learning environment, in contrast to the traditional school, the whole point is to find individuals prepared and willing to share their deepest passions and most highly developed expertise with our children. Ali and Meera learned early through personal experience that people make different and varied contributions to the community, and that excellence outside of the teaching realm has merit. They don't have to wait for the occasional "career day" or be blessed with a rare glimpse of a teacher's "outside" interests. Our children have become well-rounded individuals, not because they have learned to accept the fiction that all school subjects (and those subjects alone) should be accorded equal value in their eyes, since they take up the same amount of space on their report cards or count for the same in their grade point average. Rather they have been able to sample and experience over time and throughout their own development the richness and diversity our community has to offer. Instead of encountering teachers teaching, Ali and Meera have had serious and sometimes lasting encounters and relationships with scientists and wildlife biologists undertaking research, musicians composing and performing, theater directors directing, poets writing, astronomers observing, and have continuing opportunities to learn from each of them.

This has been *hard work*. It has demanded consciously expanding our network of friends and acquaintances and carefully evaluating each new learning relationship into which our children enter. It has meant time regularly perusing newspaper and community publications and calendars for potential opportunities, and a willingness to call strangers on the telephone and ask questions which may reveal either our partial or total ignorance. It has dictated an enormous amount of schedule juggling, and an ongoing day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year reevaluation of the optimal relationship between our children's organized and unorganized activities. It has required learning when not to accept "no" for an answer, and to express just the right amount of impatience or indignation to overcome obstacles and cross over boundaries standing in the way of our family's unconventional educational choices. And we've had to figure this all out as we went along, as our children grew and changed. As we did so, we had to admit humbly to ourselves that each new solution we found was only tentative, not necessarily applicable to both our children, or to anyone else's for that matter. We try to keep ourselves open, as we watch and listen. ◆

Watching Children Learn

Rediscovering Math

Eryn Young of Connecticut writes:

For years, I have always thought of math as a nemesis. I have been homeschooled since I was 6 and was introduced to math as "learning the times tables" and "plodding through pre-algebra." I always disliked it and saw it as a bunch of confusing numbers and letters that had no value in my life. When I began high school as a homeschooler (it was a computer course; we worked under a private school that supplied distance courses and mentoring), it got even worse and plodding through the muck of Algebra, Geometry, and Algebra II almost ruined mathematics for me. It was something to get through as quickly as possible. I plodded my way through, sometimes cheating, but never actually learning and understanding it.

After I graduated this high school program at 14, I started unschooling (I'm 15 now). Since I didn't plan on going to college until years later, and I was done with formal high school work, I could do most anything I wanted, at least as far as education was concerned. For months, I completely ignored anything to do with math.

The first break was physics. A few months ago, I read *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking and, to my amazement, I found that I could understand the mathematical concepts of general relativity, as well as black holes and curved space. My interest in physics is skyrocketing, and I am reading more on the subject and learning a lot. I realize now that math is not just something in textbooks that schools use to torture you with. It's an actual concept that is misunderstood by thousands of people.

Another break came from a movie *The Matrix*. This movie was not really about math itself, but it used a lot of interesting concepts about reality (or lack thereof), time and space, and there was a surprising amount of math in it. That night, after seeing the movie, I lay in bed and thought about it. And then I realized that I could understand the concept of an algebra matrix. I lay there stunned, thinking, "Wow. This is cool."

After that, I started getting into computer art. I started fooling around and creating pictures, mostly abstract and surreal kind of stuff. One picture was a rather surreal scene of a room with a piano, a stool, a music stand, and mirrors. The room was curved, like a wave was going through it. The picture, which I printed out and put on my wall, is called "Space is Fluid."

Another picture I drew revolutionized geometry for me. In this one, the theme was also a room. This room had one mirror, a rug, and a table. I drew it completely in lines. The rug I drew lines across, making the lines smaller on the far side and bigger on the closer side. I stopped and stared at it and thought, "I can change perspective." In this case, I discovered that geometry is not just lines and shapes, but how they affect our perspective of the universe, and much more.

It was much like drawing the other picture, where I had been thinking "I can change space." Each picture I make draws me closer to understanding mathematical concepts.

I am still rediscovering math. In fact, I think I have only begun. Most likely, I will never finish. After long thought, I have come to the conclusion that math is the concept that has been the most ruined by textbooks and enforced learning. It is being taught upside down. People are made to learn math by plodding through the numbers and symbols before they can even grasp the universal concepts themselves, and they learn to hate math long before they can even have a chance to learn to love it.

Playing Games Together

Todd Taska (VT) writes:

Reading the section in GWS #127 on "Learning Through Play," the thoughts of Zachary Hoyt (ME) caught my eye and provoked my own thoughts. For many years now we, as a family, have been playing all sorts of games. Now that our children, Hannah and Ben, are almost 12 and almost 10, they can provide incredibly tough competition in many different games.

It seems to me that Zachary's grandmother is right when she says that "all games are educational," but one must ask just what is being taught by each particular game. For example, there are many games on the market that claim to be educational, but in reality, very little information is actually learned in the process of playing these games, for without a meaningful context, the mere presentation of facts is indescribably dull and these facts are usually imediately forgotten. Though these games often attempt to jazz up (i.e. disguise) their basically lame structure, we often find them dull to play.

What we like better are the games that do not claim to teach any particular subject. Games involving combinatorial thinking with numbers or letters are always popular and fiercely contested. Boggle and Rummikub are two that come to mind.

Of course, combining these pattern recognition and thinking-oriented games with a speed element produces such games as Set, an immensely challenging game that our daughter can whip us at. We are also rather addicted to playing multiple solitaire (like solitaire except that everyone plays onto everyone's ace piles). This is tremendous training in keeping track of a lot of things happening all at once at high speed (good for those aspiring to be air-traffic controllers, perhaps).

I suppose that my point here is that many games that one might not think of as specifically educational can and do teach many valuable thinking skills. Every game has strategies that can, when followed, enhance one's chances of winning. After playing the game Clue for many years with nary a clue of how to increase my chances of winning, a few years ago I finally figured out how to use all that information, information gleaned indirectly from the questions being asked by the other players. Now, instead of merely hoping to make it to the right room to ask the right question in time (i.e. before somebody else figures it out), I can confidently play expecting to at least come very close to winning, even if I don't make it into the right rooms to ask the right questions.

Having kids has been a great spur to us to try games that we had previously neglected. Chess, Othello, and Mancala are three examples here. Each has much strategy and potential challenge for everyone, and chess has such potential complexity that it deserves a category all its own.

Even some of those games which involve mostly chance, such as Monopoly, can have strategies that will improve those chances for you. And, of course, most games should (and hopefully do) teach the essential skills of waiting for one's turn and paying attention to what the other players are doing.

Ironically, and probably to the chagrin of the big game manufacturers, many great games involve no more than playing cards or pencil and paper. One of our favorites, and a good simple introduction to creative writing, is an old-time game called Consequences. Players take turns adding one line at a time to a very short story, following a certain structure which ensures that it will "make sense" when finished. When the resulting stories are read aloud they are often hilarious.

All these games and many more have much to teach us, though probably not what we might at first suspect.

Homeschooling Helps Mother Recover Enthuasiasm

Cindy Thoman-Terlazzo of Maryland writes:

Somewhere I read or heard that one of the perks of parenting is that one has the opportunity to revisit all those stages of life that we've been through before. With awareness, I am finding this experience of parenting and homeschooling to be a treasure chest. All the rights and wrongs of our lives are offered up to us for a second go-round. The things that were so very right in growing up, we can replicate and expand upon. The wrongs we can approach from another view and perhaps make peace with some of our demons. I'm finding this to be especially true as I share my children's journey through their teen and pre-teen years and watch them blossom and grow.

Childhood was a mixed bag for me. I had good memories, to be certain, but a lot of family energy was spent negotiating my parents' difficult marriage and subsequent divorce. In spite of or perhaps because of this I was one of those kids who did extremely well in school. I got top grades without a great deal of struggle. I made friends easily. I held class and student council offices through all of my high school career. I was good at doing what was expected of me, what the system (family and school) required of me.

However, upon high school graduation, I was clueless as to what I was about, what really mattered to me. And consequently, without the externally imposed rulebook that school offered me, I floundered for some time. Oh, I held jobs and did good work. I got a partial scholarship to college but lasted only a short while because I really couldn't figure out what I was there for. I was footing the bill and it made much more sense to me at the time to leave and make money, rather than spend it on something I didn't understand. I traveled some to try and answer my restless spirit. I married and soon after became a mother, still having rather large questions about myself. What *are*

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my dreams? What do *I* want to do with my life? Meanwhile, life was playing out day by day.

Three years ago, while he was still in public school, my son's biggest complaint was 'I don't get to see enough of you and Dad." My husband and I felt the poignancy of his statement and looked at our lives through his eyes to find remedies to this concern.

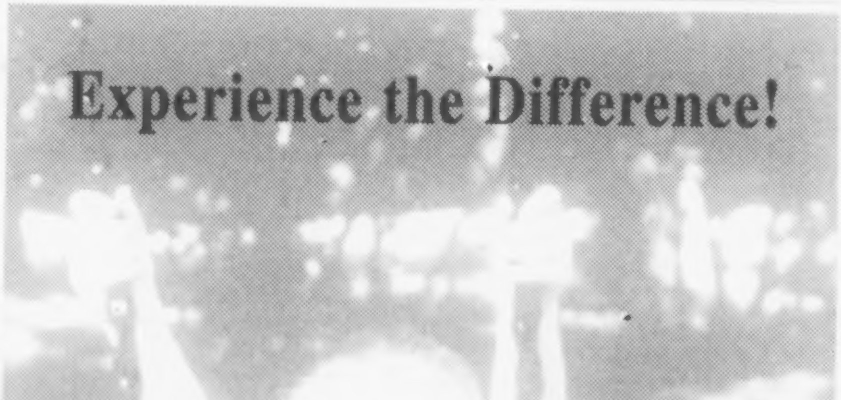
For the past two years, we have been homeschooling. As I help my kids to explore their world and look at their options, I am finding a lost or misplaced portion of my own spirit return to me.

What I want for my kids is for them to know themselves from the inside out, to become familiar with themselves from their own assessment of their weaknesses and strengths, and then find ways to crack the world open and go after their dreams. As a byproduct of this exploration, I'm finding that by looking at all these ideas with the kids, I am rekindling and newly discovering *my* loves and passions, this time from the inside out. I am changing to make room for more of myself to emerge.

Many of the changes that I've noticed in myself are difficult to pin down as specific accomplishments. They are things like feeling like I'm in charge of making choices about how I use my time, rather than feeling used by outside demands on my time; pausing to appreciate the beauty and complexities of our lives and deepening my sense of wonder. To me, these are the subtleties of life that make living a richer experience.

I've rekindled my excitement about exploring and learning, whether by delving into topics with the kids or following singular pursuits such as writing. I've been taking the time to play with words, moving them around to try to get them to hit the bullseye of my feelings and then taking a risk and sending them off to be considered for publication. I've rearranged my work life, changing to a job that allows for a huge amount of free time so that I have the elbow room to explore again.

Perhaps the most important change is finding those remedies to my son's concerns. Relationships have had the time to deepen and strengthen. We all – my husband, daughter, son, and I – are finding this approach to life and to learning to be providing so very much more than we imagined when we first wet our feet in this river.



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Late Reading is Fine

Alan Thomas, a Visiting Fellow at the University of London Institute of Education, conducted a study of homeschooling families in England and Australia, which he published as the book *Educating Children at Home* (available in the U.S. from Continuum Publishing Co., 370 Lexington Ave, NY NY 10017-6550). Here's a excerpt about late readers:

> A wholly unexpected finding was the number of children [in the study] who learned to read "late," even as late as 10 or 11 years of age. Even more surprising was that starting to read late had, as far as could be ascertained, no adverse effect on intellectual development, self-worth, or even subsequent attainment in literacy. In general these "late" readers soon caught up with and passed the reading level commensurate with their ages and, in common with most other home educated children, went on to thoroughly enjoy reading.
>
> Finding children who were apparently behind in learning to read was contrary to my own expectations that home educated children would be ahead, simply by virtue of extra individual attention. In the final analysis of 100 families, a total of 19

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children (12 male, 7 female) could be described as "late" readers out of 105 who had never been to school and were aged at least 8 years of age at the time of the interview. It is fair to conclude that learning to read "late" is a feature of home education, at least for those children who have never been to school.

A finding as significant as this must be taken seriously. Parents might well exaggerate their children's attainments but are highly unlikely to dwell on what others might see as their failings. In fact, many had to field strong criticisms from spouses, relatives, and friends because their children were not reading by the "appropriate" age. ...

The experience of these late-reading children challenges the general belief that children should learn to read by the age of 7. ... There is good reason for it in school because of the likelihood of falling behind and the accompanying sense of failure. But why do children need to read by 7 years of age? It is simply because it is the way that teaching is organized in school. From the age of 7, most classroom tasks an activities depend heavily on reading and writing. There is, however, no theoretical rationale for it.

Disciples of the Steiner philosophy might claim that the lack of desire on the part of some children to learn to read before the age of 7 is in accord with their practice of not starting teaching of reading before this age. But there is no basis for this claim either. Many children happily learn to read before this age, sometimes without being directly taught.

Children in school who fail to learn by the prescribed age of 7 face pressure from parents and teachers alike, and possibly rejection by other children because they stand out as in need of special help. Perhaps it is because of the sense of failure on the part of the school that it is easier to locate the "problem" in the child, ascribing lack of reading progress to various conditions such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, information processing disorders and various other learning difficulties, thereby inflating the actual prevalence of these conditions in the school population.

A more general and insidious consequence of the intense preoccupation with the teaching of reading in school is that many children resignedly and painstakingly acquire the mechanics of reading without enjoyment, and so never come to see it as a pleasurable activity. ...

What these home-educated children are telling us is that the age at which they learn to read, within certain limits, may not matter. As long as children have the necessary pre-reading information processing skills, and these are crucial, we should not be too concerned about when they start reading. The trouble is that this does not fit in with school organizational requirements. But the cost, in school, may be more reading failures than necessary and certainly a lessening in the enjoyment of reading as children grow older. ...

Teachers in school are always urging children to read for enjoyment, presumably in order to improve literacy and general knowledge. But their exhortations often fall on deaf ears. Two older [homeschooled] children, who had recently started school, remarked on their classmates' lack of interest, even ability in reading. One, aged 13, at a highly selective school, said "a lot of my friends don't like reading." ...

The reason that many children in school do not read for pleasure might be that they simply do not have the time. There is very little opportunity during the school day and not a great deal of incentive to read at home after a full day in school, especially if there is homework and other after-school activities. Home-educated children do have the time ... ◆

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Beyond GWS: Growing Without Education

Aaron Falbel of Massachusetts writes:

At last year's GWS conference, I asked Pat Farenga and Susannah Sheffer a hypothetical but serious question during the Q & A session toward the end of the conference. I noted that both John Holt and Ivan Illich eventually came to see that escaping from schooling was only a beginning, a first step in a journey of social change they hoped people would take. They saw that people could easily abandon school yet still cling tenaciously to the idea of education, even when homeschooling or deschooling was allegedly being carried out. In 1976, Holt wrote *Instead of Education* in which he argued against education, not just against schooling. He defined education as "something that some people do to others for their own good, molding and shaping them, and trying to make them learn what they think they ought to know." I asked Pat and Susannah what it would mean to grow, not just without schooling, but without education – setting aside, for the purposes of the discussion, current legal restrictions that might impede putting such an idea into practice. What, I asked, might the contents of a hypothetical magazine, GWE, look like?

I want to try to answer this question for myself and perhaps, if others are interested, to start a written exchange in this magazine exploring the idea of growing without education (GWE).

Readers of GWS already know what's wrong with schooling, but what's so bad about education? Many homeschoolers, after all, feel they can carry out education better and more effectively outside of school. Holt saw the entire enterprise of education – that is, of people-shaping – as morally pernicious. And, influenced no doubt by Illich, he saw education as bolstering a type of society he felt was shallow, hollow, empty, alienating, unsustainable, and ultimately "antihuman." In 1976 he wrote:

> "Education ... now seems to me perhaps the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and 'fans,' driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy, and fear. My concern is not to improve 'education' but to do away with it, to end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping and to allow and help people to shape themselves."

I might quibble with Holt about that last bit regarding helping people to shape themselves, but I'll leave that for another essay. What I want to emphasize here is that Holt and Illich's critique of education is linked with a larger critique of modern society in general. In other words, their objection to education is part of a certain political outlook, which homeschoolers or readers of GWS may or may not share (and Holt would not necessarily have expected all homeschoolers or all readers of GWS to share it). My aim in writing this essay is not to convince readers to adopt this political outlook. But if readers do share these concerns about the fate of modern society, I'd like to invite them to explore the way in which education is a key component of the mess we're in.

Education props up and bolsters the absurdities of the modern world. Education as people-shaping, whether it happens in school or at home, is geared toward making people *fit in*, shaping them to fit in, whether that means getting into college or getting a good job or just "being successful" in the modern economy. Now, we all want our children to be successful, don't we? Not necessarily. If we agree with Holt and Illich that society is in as bad a shape as they say it is, then becoming a success in such a society may be the worst thing we could wish for our children. In an overly materialistic, tremendously voracious, wasteful, exploitative, consumptive, technophilic, militaristic, competitive society, being a successful, functioning member would only compound the problem.

I also want to underscore that much of what Holt and Illich find wrong with society can be classified as having to do with economics – or more precisely with the way economics controls nearly every facet of our lives. Illich, in particular, links education with the notion of *scarcity*. He defines education as "learning under the assumption of scarcity." This is a rather technical point, so it might take some explaining. Scarcity is the linchpin of economics, of economic society. By scarcity, Illich does not mean a temporary lack or shortage but a generalized condition or perception that things are of value in proportion to their rarity. Money is the most obvious scarce commodity. If money were abundant and freely available, it would cease to have economic value – it would become just paper. The same is true for abundant human activities that are rendered scarce; they become commodities. Learning, dwelling, working, walking, and healing become education, housing, jobs, transportation, and health care. Verbs are turned into nouns. These latter nouns are scarce and must be obtained or purchased from someone else. Illich writes:

> "Economics always implies the assumption of scarcity. What is not scarce cannot be subjected to economic control. This is as true of goods and services as it is of work. The assumption of scarcity has penetrated all modern institutions. Education is built on the assumption that desirable knowledge is scarce. ... The identification of that which is desirable with that which is scarce has deeply shaped our thinking, our feeling, our perception of reality itself."

Thus, education only appears when we feel a need to make sure that certain scarce knowledge is imparted. Knowledge that is abundant in the world is readily learnable and therefore needs no special arrangements. Of course, life itself sometimes necessitates schedules, deadlines, and other "arrangements" in order to do the things we want to do, or are obligated to do, but these are not educational arrangements. They are simply part of the logistics of life. This difference is important.

IN AN INTERVIEW with CBC radio broadcaster (and homeschooling father) David Cayley, Illich explained how he came to link up the concept of education with the economic notion of scarcity:

> "I asked the question, which are the conditions under which the very idea of education can arise? You can't have the modern idea of education if you don't believe there is knowledge – knowledge which can be packaged, knowledge which can be defined, knowledge which constitutes a value which can be appropriated. I therefore became concerned with the mental frame or space within which the concepts by which we contruct the notion of education can take shape. ... This was the beginning of my interest in writing a history of scarcity. ... I began to speak of education as learning under the assumption that the means for this purpose are scarce. If I had only one desire, it would be to get across to the people who study education, researchers *on* education, that they should not study what happens *in* education, but how the *very idea* of this nonsense could have come into existence."

Under the rubric of education, the natural, human activity we know as *learning* becomes commodified and is therefore made scarce, regardless of whether one actually pays money for instruction. Learning then has to be acquired – at school, at home, on the job, through an apprenticeship, over the Internet, on TV, via the news media – and then *accounted for*. To reject education means to reject in our own minds, at the very least, this type of accounting, even if the homeschooling laws currently on the books require it.

To ask what is wrong with the idea of education, then, is to ask what is wrong with modern economic society. For Illich and Holt, and other critics as well, economics takes what is best about humanity and deeply corrupts it. It turns care, love, neighborliness, kindness, community – indeed, most aspects of life – into professional economic services. Economic competition pits people against each other. Economic hegemony takes what people used to be able to make and do for themselves and turns them into commodities and services that must be obtained or purchased. This becomes tragic when people are profoundly alienated from such basic subsistence activities as providing their own food, water, clothing, fuel, and shelter. For example, people are hungry in the

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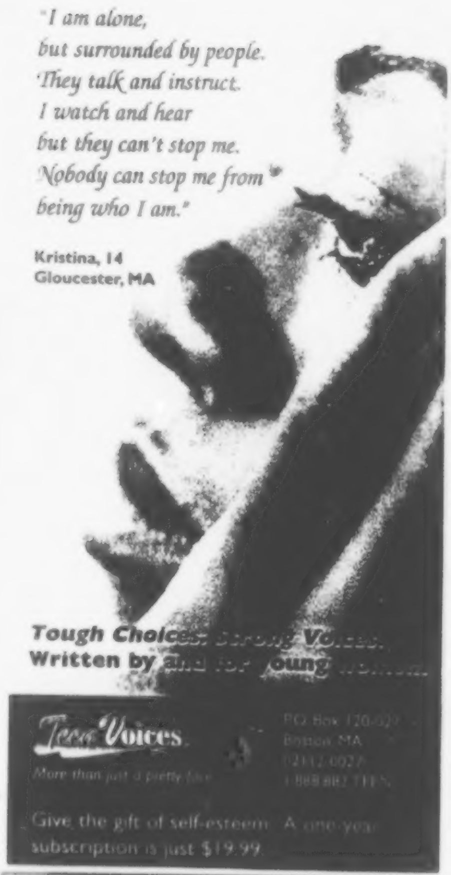

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U.S. today not because there is a shortage of food – we discard billions of pounds of edible food annually – but because some people don't have the scarce money/jobs necessary to purchase it. People become victims and hostages to the ups and downs of the economy, in which, according to the laws of scarcity, there must be winners *and* losers.

SCARCITY IS LINKED with two other concepts that lie deep at the core of modern society: *progress* and *development.* Most of us grew up viewing progress and development as "good things," but decades of pollution, environmental degradation, social polarization, resource depletion, and frustrated expectations have convinced some of us otherwise. Education is a form of human development that knows no end or limit. Education as preparation-for-life teaches that the good life necessarily involves a scramble for scarce resources. Education teaches us that our native abilities for learning are inadequate, that they must be developed and improved upon by submitting to or even seeking out pedagogical management of some sort. Education teaches us that we must adapt ourselves to society as it is, that we must keep pace with the dictates of "progress," that life is a race, and that we need education to get ahead of the next guy or else we'll be left behind.

Growing without education is a deeply radical concept. It goes beyond GWS because it criticizes not just the means (schooling) but the ends: the goal of "the educated person" *and* the type of society that person is being educated into. GWE questions whether any of us – even parents – have the right to treat young people like lumps of clay which they can shape however they wish, or mold according to "society's needs." Instead, GWE asks us to trust children – to really trust them, which is not an easy thing to do. It assumes that young people do not need to undergo educational treatment if they are to make sense of the world. Indeed, educational treatment usually stands in the way of true understanding and real critical thinking. Children who grow without education may or may not come to embrace the larger social critique outlined here. That must be their own decision. But they will be a lot freer to make up their own minds on these matters than those who are educated to accept the myths of modern economic society.

THE IDEA OF GWE would reject the notion that children have educational needs. They have interests, things they are curious about, questions they want answered, things they want to do or try – but these are different from educational needs. Desires are not the same as needs. Desires are wishes or wants that may or may not be satisfyable. Needs, according to Illich, are demands for commodities or services, which come to be regarded as entitlements. Needs can only arise when one can identify a technical process whereby the perceived lack can be – indeed, ought to be – satisfied. Only after the consolidation of the food production and distribution industries did people have a "need for food." Prior to that, they were hungry. People have always been curious, have always learned things. Only recently, when learning was disembedded from the rest of life and treated as a separate entity that could be delivered and administered, did people feel a need for education (and feel deprived if they didn't get it). Historically, this need coincided with the emergence of economic society in the 17th and 18th centuries. Prior to this time, education, in so far as it existed at all, was a leisure pursuit or was connected with highly circumscribed activities. It was not *needed,* certainly not as a prerequisite for life, as the modern-day concept dictates.

A magazine titled GWE would not look very different from GWS, as Susannah pointed out last year, except that it would probably not contain articles about innovative approaches to math or reading or history or what have you. These subjects simply do not exist in life apart from the real-world activities in which they are embedded. Readers of GWE magazine would not worry whether the young people in their midst have "enough" math or are reading at an "age-appropriate level." Articles in GWE magazine would stick to descriptions of interesting things people did, not how a certain apprenticeship advanced their knowledge of biology or history or whatever. Young people who are growing without education would pursue activities strictly for their own sake, not for the sake of their educations.

All of the above is *not* meant to be a criticism of GWS or its readers. GWS must be a reflection of its readership, at whatever conceptual place they are and taking into account the various external factors they face. GWE, at this point, is only a thought experiment. I fully realize that laws in many states require that we chop life up into school subjects. But my purpose for engaging in this thought experiment is to be clear in our own minds what we are buying into when we "educate" our children at home. My point is that education is a concept with many strings attached. GWE is my way of bringing those strings into sharper focus. (It is one thing to fill out a report for the principal or superintendent full of educational jargon to make them happy. It is another thing for those reports to colonize our own worldview and influence the way we relate to children.) Even in a soci-ety such as ours that is totally addicted to education, GWE is a reminder that we don't have to let education get the better of us.

For me, what is most important and most beautiful about the concept of GWE is that, freed from the constraints of education and the mindset of scarcity, from trying to fit their kids into an unworkable society, families could finally concentrate on *living*, on the quality of life in their neighborhoods and communities. They would have the time, space, and mental energy in their lives to ask of themselves: What kind of life do we want to live? How can we go about living it? How can we live a decent, grounded, rooted life even in a society that militates against decency and grounded-ness? (Michael Fogler's book, *Un-Jobbing*, is one person's attempt to answer such questions along the lines I have been discussing.) These are among the questions that education obscures, questions that can be uncovered and brought to light if we can allow ourselves to grow without education. ◆

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1999 Directory was published in GWS #126.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is *not* a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Paul & Elizabeth SCHROEDER (Carissa/94, Zachary/97) 326 Gonzalez Dr. San Francisco 94132 ••• Qayima & Will ROGERS (Rami/93) 117 White Oak Cir. Petaluma 94952

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Rosemary & Jay ROBB (Angelo Joseph/89) 2605 Abedul St. Carlsbad 92009 (change) ••• Brenda & Stuart ANDERSON (girl/93, boy/96) 4998 Park Rim Dr. San Diego 92117-1720

IN — David & Tamara JONES (Brandon/82, Kedric/85, Derek/88, LaShana/91) 1688 Mt Gilead, Boonville 47601 (change) **(H)**

IA — Dale & Kathy POLSON (Jessica/89, Ethan/91, Emily/94, Julia/99) 909 NE Canterbury Dr. Ankeny 50021 (H) ••• Cindy CONNOR & Max WEAVER (Max/91, Ruben/93) 317 20th St SE, Mason City 50401

MD — Teresa WILLIAMS & Jo DEUTSCH (Jake/90, Matt/94) 3205 Tremont Av, Cheverly 20785-1136

MA — Michael BAINES & Linda SCOTT (Abigail/83, Arthur/85) 70 Baker Rd, Shutesbury 01072

MT — Barb & Bob BARTLEY (Danny/94, Nora/96) 810 Swan Ln, Stevensville 59870 **(H)**

NM — Cyndy & Michael FEDOROVICH (Melissa/77, Stacey/84, Emily/87) PO Box 3384, Edgewood 87015 **(H)**

NY — Diana PRYNTZ & Brian NADWORNY (Avi/87, Rafi/90, Kaniel/93, Doriel/95) 3441 Irish Settlement Rd. Belmont 14813 **(H)**

NC — Evelyn & Martin BROW (Nicholas/92, Eleanor/95) 871 Weaver Cabe Rd, Franklin 28734 **(H)** ••• Sue & Hobey FORD (Lauren/83, Sallie/87, Louisa/90) 62 Ballard Branch Rd, Weaverville 28787 **(H)**

TX — Vicki DENNIS (Matt/79, AJ/84) 10800 Creekview Dr. Austin 78748 **(H)**

VA — Elaine & Don SUNNEN (Amelia/92, Jonah/94) 416 Honeysuckle Hill, Lexington 24450

Canada:

ON — Julie SCHRYER (Myriam/87, Suzanne/88, Zachary/91, Benoit/94) RR 2, McKinnon Side Rd. Desbarats P0R 1E0 **(H)**

Other Locations — Michaelina MEERBACH & Greg HALLAM (Joshua/92, Darcy/97) 46 Harper St, Wangaratta, Victoria 3677 **Australia (H)** ••• Jennifer CORCORAN & Peter TADD (Noa/87, Athena/89, Fionn/92) Foilnamuc, Ballydehob, Co. Cork **Ireland (H)** ••• Anna & Morris CASSIE (Eliza/96, Sally/99) 51 Ohariu Rd, Johnsonville, Wellington **New Zealand (H)** ••• John & Jane DE LA HAYE (Samuel/86) Free Church Manse, 41 Francis St, Wick, Caithness **Scotland** KW1 5NR (change) **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #126:

GA: Spectrum Homeschoolers, c/o Leslie Montemayor, 3426 Williams Pl, Conyers 30013; 770-760-0518; montemayor@mindspring.com

IN: Michiana LIFE (Learning in Family Environment), c/o Nancy Sawyer, 2736 Southridge Dr, South Bend 46614; pnsawyer@earthlink.net; www.onelist.com/subscribe/Michiana-LIFE (includes families in SW Michigan)

IA: IDEA (Iowans Dedicated to Educational Alternatives), c/o Katy Diltz, 3296 Linn-Buchanan Rd, Coggon 52218; 319-224-3675; http://home.plutonium.net/~pdiltz/idea/

MO: LEARN, PO Box 10105, Kansas City 64171; 913-383-7888; AsinyL@aol.com; www.kclearn.org (includes families in Kansas)

NJ: Central Jersey Homeschoolers, c/o Brenda Costanzo, 23D Franklin St, S Bound Brook 08880; rcostanz@ix.netcom.com

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. To be listed, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put your address on your letter.

Tommy HENINGER (9) PO Box 3090, Chester CA 96020; computers, sports, reading ••• Elizabeth MICHALAK (11) P Box 604, Crestone CO 81131; horses, reading, writing ••• Alissa BRUNET (12) 1351 Lilac Ln, Carol Stream IL 60188; gymnastics, flute, acting ••• Emily OWENS (13) 530 Buckingham Rd Apt #1222, Richardson TX 75081; reading, acting, mythology ••• MASTROE, PO Box 107, E Homer NY 13056; McKenzie (11) swimming, shopping, soccer; Keegan (9) skiing, roller blading, hiking; Reilley (9) hiking, animals, drawing ••• Sunny YARBOROUGH (12) 2337 Greenway Av, Charlotte NC 28204; dancing, reading, babysitting ••• Anna BASALAEV-BINDER (10) 321 Harper Pl, Highland Park NJ 08904; soccer, art, climbing ••• Iona COOPER (10) 102 Clay St, Milltown NJ 08850; soccer, art, The Beatles

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter. (3) If you're writing to a specific person, write "GWS" or "Holt Associates" on the envelope in addition to the individual's name.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few

(cont. next page)

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

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issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or proscriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS: just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

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GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

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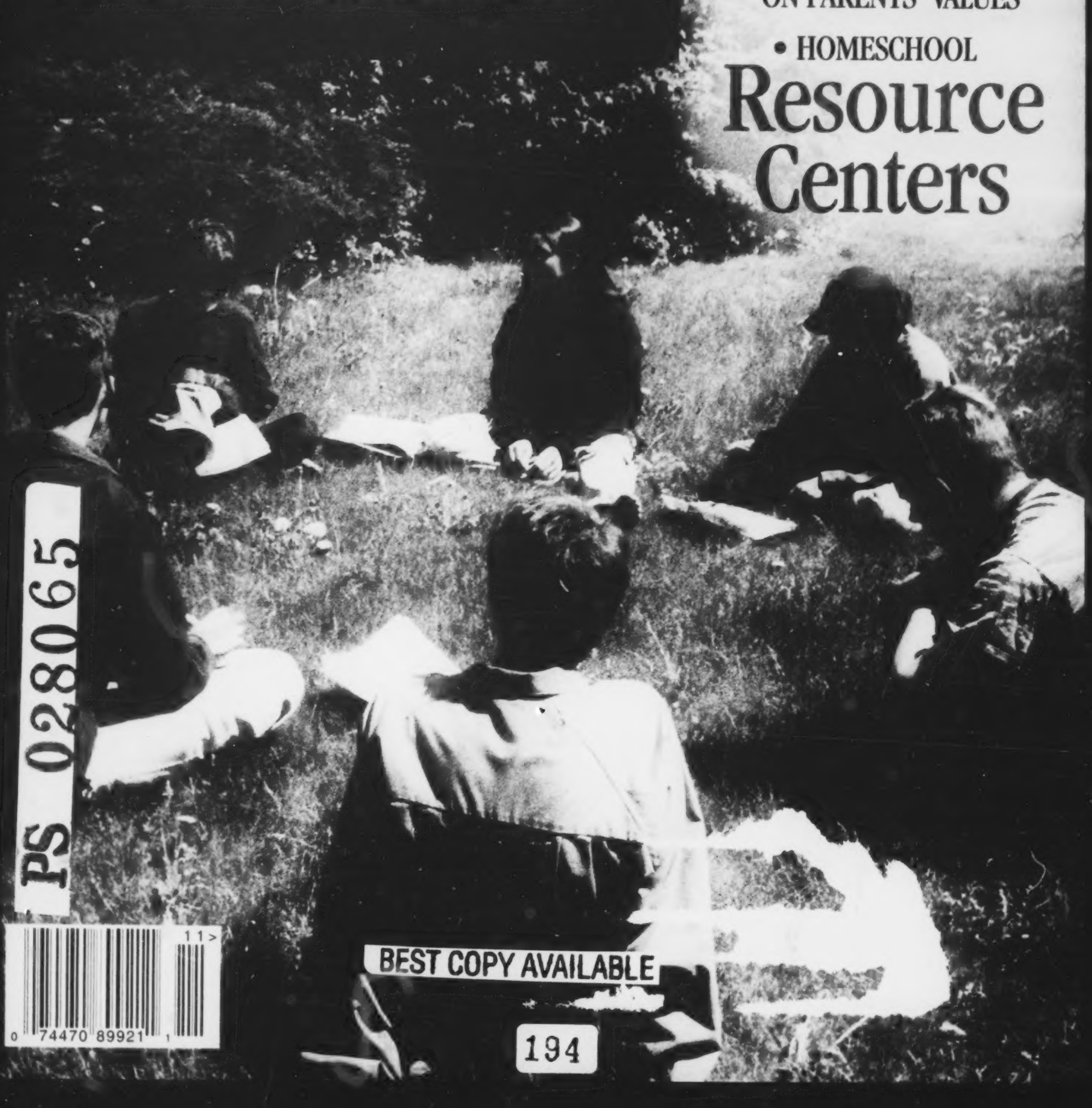

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GWS

FOUNDED IN 1977
BY JOHN HOLT

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

Try this: make a list of things that were important to your parents when you were growing up – things that mattered to them, ideas or beliefs or values or skills that they considered important.

Now look at some of the items on your list and ask yourself, "How did I know that? How did I know that my parents valued that?"

Chances are, those items aren't all on your list because your parents explicitly said to you, "This is important to me." So many of parents' beliefs and values and preferences become apparent because they are manifest in the way they live and the way the family lives together. Parents don't have to *say* they value family togetherness and conversation if it's clear that nothing interferes with family dinner hour, not even a ringing phone. Parents don't have to say they think reading is important if they themselves read widely and often.

GWS parents know that their examples carry a lot of weight with their children. But sometimes the idea of actually saying, straight out, that you believe it's important to learn or do or know something seems frightening, because it seems too much like requiring or imposing. It seems to run counter to what John Holt and others have said about letting the learner be in charge.

Are there situations in which a parent (or other adult) can say, "I think this is important to know" and still be respectful of the child as a self-directed learner? In this issue's Focus, David Colfax and Nancy Gruver argue that parents don't have to fear making such statements as long as their children know — really know — that they can ask why. If it's clearly OK for there to be a freeflowing exchange of ideas and for the child to question what the parents say, then parents don't have to hold back as much as some unschoolers fear. In fact, one of the best things we can give children is ourselves and what we know and care about. When we offer children our beliefs, our values, our sense of what is important and worthwhile, we are giving them something real and substantive. This doesn't mean we give it by fiat, by saying, "This is what you have to learn and that's that." No, we give it by manifesting it, as I said earlier, and then by talking about it — openly and with mutual respect. Like any learning and teaching, the passing on of values doesn't have to be a matter of requirement and submission. It can be about mutual exploration and discovery and it can involve a real exchange of ideas between adults and young people.

It's true that adults do have enormous power and thus bear responsibility for using that power well. That means *not* using it merely to impose our will on children, and not taking advantage of children's desire for adult approval by manipulating them in more subtle ways either. Still, I believe that daring to be ourselves with children – which includes letting them know what matters to us – is not a misuse of power. On the contrary, it's a way of offering the real connection and caring that so many young people deeply crave. — Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Homeschooling in Israel

Sara-Rivka Ernstoff, who wrote in GWS #114 about the difficulties homeschoolers in Israel were experiencing, now writes:

Things are looking up for homeschoolers in Israel. On August 13th, the national newspaper *Ha'aretz* came out with a feature on home education. My family was featured along with three others. In addition, the reporter interviewed Chava Dageni, a woman who wrote her doctoral thesis on homeschooling, and a representative of the government.

It was an extremely positive article. The reporter managed to convey the essence of unschooling, the parental commitment, our excitement and love of learning. They even quoted my daughter's math tutor (a retired professor who sits in the park and does math and physics with all who approach him) as saying in his broken Hebrew, "School bad, home good."

The article set off a flurry of media attention. The day it came out, I appeared on a TV chat show with my daughter Channi, 8, and a fellow homeschooling mother was on a rival station along with the Minister of Education.

We have a new government here, and with it came positive changes for homeschoolers. The new policy is that all people in normal situations who request permission to homeschool will receive it. One request was rejected after it was discovered that the child in question was supporting the family.

In the last week I've been interviewed for a radio show and asked to appear on three more television shows. I'm accepting all offers. I recently lectured on homeschooling in a nearby town and 25 people showed up. An alternative school has invited me to speak this week. The phone hasn't stopped ringing since the article came out. I've received several calls from parents who are already homeschooling and want to join my support group. And my neighbor six houses away has decided to homeschool, so I've gone from feeling isolated and lonely to ecstatic.

Here is the address for our group: Israeli Homeschooling Information Center, c/o Ernstoff, DN Tzafon Yehuda, Israel 90908, phone 2-9960248б, email Ernstoff@netmedia.net.il

Testing News

Paula Praus-Williamson (see the story about the HomeSource resource center, page 18 this issue) tells us that the homeschooling law in Oregon recently changed, making the standardized testing requirement somewhat less stringent. Formerly, homeschoolers in Oregon were required to take standardized tests every year; now homeschoolers are tested on the same schedule as public school students: after 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades. Another change in the homeschool law simplifies the registration process: in the past this too had to be done annually, and now families only have to register once, unless they change school districts.

In New York, another state that requires testing of homeschoolers (every other year after 4th grade), Anne Hodge of the New York Home Educators' Network tells us that she and others have discovered one way to make the testing requirement easier to meet. The Personalized Achievement Summary System (PASS) test, developed by Hewitt Homeschooling Resources, is a test designed to be given at home, untimed, and at the child's skill level rather than grade level. The child takes a pre-test to determine skill level, and picking the appropriate level allows the actual test to correspond more closely to the child's actual abilities. Anne says that this test has been particularly useful for her "test-phobic daughter," and although it isn't listed among the approved tests on the packet that the State Department of Education sends out to homeschoolers, families who ask to use the PASS test have been allowed to do so. The test is available for a fee from Hewitt Homeschooling Resources, PO Box 9, Washougal WA 98671, phone 360-835-8708.

Office News

[SS:] As I write this in early September, the office is bustling: phones are ringing with people asking last-minute questions about our conference, customers are ordering books from our new catalog, new homeschoolers are eagerly (and somewhat nervously) asking for information as the school year officially begins, and old-timers are calling too, looking for support and information as well.

You'll see in this issue and in our new catalog that we've had to raise GWS subscription prices slightly. We've kept subscription prices steady since 1990 despite several increases in our printing costs during that time. This small increase will help us meet our costs, and at $26 a year, subscribers still pay much less than the cover price for each chock-full issue.

NOW IS THE TIME to check your listing in our Directory of Families and Organizations (the complete list was last published in GWS #126, and there are updates in each issue). Let us know of any corrections or deletions just as soon as you receive this issue, and we'll work to make the 2000 Directory (in GWS #132) as accurate as possible.
Thanks!

Science Without Textbooks

A lot of people wonder how homeschoolers – especially older kids – will do science without school facilities. As these two stories show, the world is full of real ways to learn about science and work with scientists.

Working at Natural History Museum

From Hannah Kreiger-Benson of Massachusetts:

Two years ago when I was 12, my cousin volunteered at the Harvard Museum of Natural History for a week, helping with the kids' camp. He was 14 then. I went with him for a day and it seemed really neat. The camp is called The Artful Naturalist, and it's their most popular summer camp. The woman who teaches it is an artist, and the kids, ages 8–12, do all kinds of art projects like nature drawing, animal drawing, and making clay sculptures of dinosaurs. I helped out a little bit that day, but mostly I just watched, and I really liked what I saw.

That was the summer after I left school. I was all set to begin homeschooling in the fall, and I was figuring out what I wanted to do. I can't remember if it was my mom's idea or mine for me to try working at the museum, but she set up an interview with Nancy, who works in the education office. Actually, it was more of an introduction than an interview, because I don't think there was ever a question of *whether* I would work there. I knew I wanted to, and they always need volunteers. Nancy showed me around the museum and introduced me to some people, and we talked about some projects I might help with. At that point, I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do because I didn't know what there was to do.

The museum has many teenage volunteers during the summer, but I was the first young person they had working during the year. I've now been going once a week for two years. The big project that I was working on for a long time was cataloging their collection. That was my first challenge: make a list of 800-something birds in this room. Nobody wanted that job because there were so many!

It was really neat to see how the catalog finally took form. We now have a final catalog and we're working on listing the Latin names and trying to make lists of different categories. I remember having a long discussion with the woman who started the project about how to organize it in the computer. It felt good that they ended up taking a lot of my ideas.

The other thing I've done is assist with the classes that the museum offers. I help in whatever way is necessary: sometimes getting the materials together, sometimes keeping track of the kids or helping them with whatever they're making or doing.

This year, Nancy suggested that I start working more with visitors to the museum. A couple of months ago, my sister's school class came to the museum, and I gave them an orientation in the Native American hall. That was my first time working with a group of kids, and I loved it. I don't know if I'm going to do actual guide training this year – I might not be ready for that for another couple of years – but I'm definitely going to start working more with visitors to the museum.

I'm usually the only teenager working there during the day, and generally people's response to me has been very positive. Usually people think I'm a Harvard student, because that's what occurs to them as the most obvious thing. But one reason that I think people are receptive to me is that the Harvard Museum of Natural History is an old, tucked away, musty place; it's sort of eccentric, full of odd stuff. So I think people who work there are more receptive to interesting ideas. On the other hand, the Museum of Science here in Boston is a much bigger or-ganization and they have many more rules and more formality for volunteers: you have to be 14, you have to go through volunteer training programs. So if other young people are having trouble volunteering somewhere because they're encountering those kinds of restrictions, I'd suggest trying someplace smaller and more flexible.

A big part of what makes my volunteer experience go so well is also that Nancy, the woman I work with, is so wonderful. She's been very helpful to me all along and is very good at finding projects for me. And she knows everybody in the museum and has introduced me all around.

I was invited to Nancy's wedding a couple of months ago, and it was really neat to realize that all the people I was talking to at the wedding were my friends from the museum. I realized that the museum is definitely a community that I feel part of, and I love that.

A while ago, something happened that I thought really encompassed what my whole experience at the museum is all about. I was sitting in the education office, and the guys at the front desk and one of the interns and I were having a discussion about Indian music, and meanwhile I was cataloging the Latin names of the animal collection. There were so many different things going on in that one minute. When I got home I wrote it down because I wanted to remember it. I said, "This is really what homeschooling is all about."

Observing Veterinary Surgery; Breeding Cats

From Julia Bergson-Shilcock (PA):

When I was about 14 (I'm 18 now), we were looking for some nontraditional way that I could do science, because sitting down and working out of a textbook didn't interest me. I have a huge love for animals, and whenever we took our two dogs to the vet, he could tell how much I cared about them. My mom and I asked him if there was anything I could do to help him out. He said that usually when teenagers have an interest in animals, they get a job at the kennel and end up cleaning out dog poop and not doing much else. He told us that he'd never done this before but that if I wanted to, I could come in on Wednesdays to observe surgery. I think he took a chance with me because he saw how much I cared about animals and he had always been interested in our homeschooling. Plus, he knew that I was available on weekdays.

When I went in the first time, I learned so much in just the first ten minutes. When it wasn't an emergency situation, he took the time to explain every little detail of what he was doing. I found that I was actually interested in all the scientific details and terminology. Going into the experience, I had been a little bit hesitant, because I wondered if it would be too confusing or over my head. But the vet had so much patience and really wanted to explain things to me.

As the weeks went on, he started letting me do small parts of the job, like he'd hold the stitches up and I'd get to snip them out, or a cat would be under anesthesia and I'd get to clean its teeth with a machine. Each week he gave me more and more responsibility and went into more depth about why they do certain things. I got to see everything first hand. Someone would rush in a dog that had been hit by a car and I'd see how a veterinarian handles an emergency situation. I was impressed that it seemed so much like a human ER. There's so much care and hurriedness, with the vet trying to do everything possible to save the animal.

I remember that the first time I observed the surgery, he said, "Let me know if you feel lightheaded, because a lot of people pass out." I did feel a little queasy at first, but I found that you get used to it. You kind of pull yourself away and look at the situation in a more technical way.

I brought one of my friends with me once, a friend who went to school, and she marveled at how much she learned in those three hours. She made a comment that this was more than she had covered in three months in school.

I continued to observe and help out weekly for most of that school year. Then my schedule started to fill up with other things, and I guess I had gone as far as I wanted to go with it at that point. It was definitely a really good way for me to have a real experience with science.

The other thing I did that our family was able to count as science was my cat breeding. I started when I was 13, and in fact I'm still doing it five years later. It began when I had saved up money (and my parents lent me some) for a purebred ragdoll kitten. They cost $800 each. When she was a year old I took her to the breeder I had bought her from, paid a $500 stud fee, and after a week she was pregnant. Before that, in preparation for breeding her, I did a lot of reading, and it was the first time I went to the library without it being initiated by one of my parents. I remember really wanting to be there and spending a lot of time looking for the books I wanted. I researched all about birthing kittens, including how to tell when a cat is pregnant, how long the gestation period is, how to set up a birthing suite for the mother, how to tell if there's something wrong when the kitten is born and what to do in that situation.

I was interested in breeding the ragdoll kittens because I always liked small furry animals – I'd been trying all my life to convince my parents that I could have a cat. And this way, I'd have new kittens all the time, but my parents also knew that after 12 weeks, the kittens would be sold. I think they also saw that it could be a great experience for me, because there was so much to it: not only was there the whole science aspect, but it became my home business. I had to figure out how to sell them, keep track of my expenses, and keep up with my reading about them because when customers ask me questions, I feel I really have to know the answers.

Julia with newborn kittens

After five years, I've built up a nice clientele for my cats and I have a really good reputation as the best cat breeder in the area, the one with the healthiest and friendliest cats. That was a wonderful surprise for me. Going into it, I didn't expect that adults would respect me so much, but there are a lot of people who have purchased cats from me and still call me up with questions. I have cats all up and down the east coast that are from my litters. In the beginning I had to do much more advertising in local pet shops and veterinary offices and on the internet, but now I have a huge waiting list just from word of mouth. I was always very careful about who I was selling to. One thing that made me feel great was when, after a few years, my old cat breeder I'd gone to when I was a little 13-year-old started recommending customers to me. ◆

Challenges & Concerns

When Mother Has Physical Challenges

Marion Webster (MA) writes:

Some might think that homeschooling and parental disability would be an unworkable combination. As a mom challenged by chronic health problems, I find homeschooling quite workable, as long as I am careful to keep priorities in order. My 9-year-old son has never been to school, and I love our homeschooling way of life. It fills me to watch him grow and mature, free of the negative effects of school's social and academic system.

I've had chronic pain and fatigue syndrome for almost twenty years. I've made slow improvement over time, but still must adjust all parts of my life to manage these problems. Homeschooling has allowed me to make these adjustments without having to sacrifice my maternal need and desire to raise my son well, despite the circumstances. Because we follow a child-directed learning philosophy, there's always enough flexibility to be creative and find ways to meet his needs and mine as well. On my good days, this feels like a very rich life indeed. On my bad days, I can at least be grateful that he's not in school.

My biggest homeschooling challenge is pacing myself. I have to be extra vigilant not to do too much and fall into "homeschool burnout" because I'll have a flare-up of symptoms. This is actually a gift, because doing too much is so easy to do, and I have a built-in barometer to guide me. I work hard to be organized and mindful about balancing everything. This is a shift from my '60s upbringing when I learned to value spontaneity and being free as the wind. The truth is that I'm most free and at peace when I'm organized, careful about my limits, and allowing margin for the unexpected. This is hard for me, because I want to do it all, but again, my body, for now, is teaching me that I have limits.

I often have to say no to requests for help from various places, such as from my church or my community. This is hard, since I don't look sick and people get miffed when I say no. Being a people-pleaser from way back, I find this quite an opportunity for emotional growth. Managing chronic pain is very stressful and eats up time and energy. For now, homeschooling is my focus, along with improving my health. When my son is grown, I can hopefully take on other things.

I've learned to be comfortable with asking for help – another hard lesson in a culture where self-sufficiency is valued so highly. I schedule play dates, do swaps, and hire older homeschoolers as babysitters so my husband and I can have occasional dates. When my son was younger, I had great success hiring mother's helpers, an idea I got from another homeschooling mom. I usually make sure that these times are set up so that they can be my time to rest or tend to my needs. I must do daily physical therapy, make and go to appointments, order special products, prepare special foods, etc.

I can't let myself indulge in comparing myself or our homeschooling life with other moms or families. The reality is that my circumstances are different from those of many, but working at maintaining a positive attitude and not comparing keeps me happy with our chosen way of life. Staying in touch with others with similar health problems, via support groups and the phone, keeps me from feeling isolated and alone when I'm with homeschooling friends.

I've also learned to continually feed my passion for homeschooling through reading GWS (current and back issues) and homeschooling books, going to support group meetings, listening to conference tapes, and staying close to other moms who are also excited and positive about homeschooling. I do ten minutes a day on the Nordic Track and usually have a GWS issue clipped on, so I read one or two articles a day at least. I need to fortify myself to withstand the strong pressures from the mainstream culture. When people learn of my health challenges and my choice to homeschool, I can get a lot of flak, especially from my health practitioners. This can be very disheartening, since I need their help and advice. But I realize they assume I'm working hard doing school-at-home. They don't know all the things about our lives that I've just written here.

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When I'm frustrated and resentful that I can't do things with or for my son that I could do if I were healthier, I find other people who can - which is not a bad thing anyway, especially for an only child. Some have said to me, how sad that your son has a mom with all these problems. Adversity comes to everyone, and I feel how lucky my son is to be learning so many living skills by watching and participating in my life.

Lest this sound like I'm always accepting and positive about my challenges, the truth is that I have many days when I'm almost beside myself with frustration. I long to function normally, without pain. But replacing our homeschooling with school is the last thing on my mind. In fact, my passion for homeschooling and my love for my many homeschooling friends, adults and children, are what keep me going and lift my spirits. Homeschooling and the homeschooling community are an anchor for me, giving me a purpose that is bigger than just my vision for my son. Homeschooling is radical in our post-modern and very troubled times. I share John Holt's vision that it could truly change the world, and I'm grateful that somehow I got to be one of the lucky ones who caught the vision.

Doing Without Education

Michael Fogler, author of the book Un-Jobbing, *writes:*

I wholeheartedly agree with the ideas expressed by Aaron Falbel in the essay about Growing Without Education (GWE) in GWS #130. Indeed, schooling is something distinct from education, while both are imprisoning. And, there are intimate connections among schooling, education, and economics. A friend of mine now calls me the "un-man" with my advocating of unschooling and unjobbing – and now there's uneducating!

Schooling has always been about babysitting and career ticketing. John Gatto talks about the Prussian model that began this whole scheme which aimed to prepare the schooled people to take their place in the factories (usually military goods factories). The adults were already in those factories

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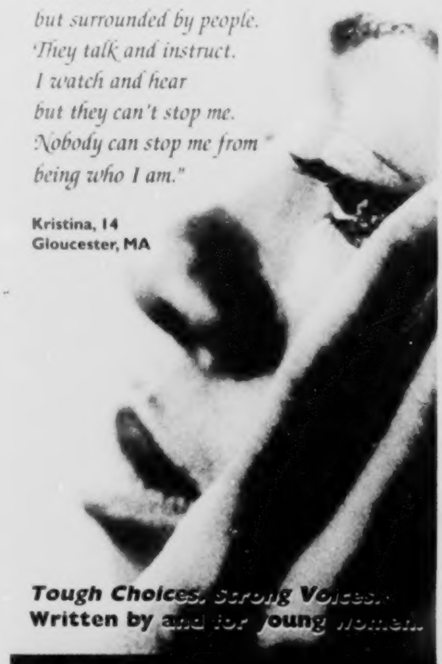

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needing to have their children babysat. Now, it's like the chicken and egg syndrome – it's hard to tell which comes first, the babysitting purpose or the career ticketing purpose. The bottom line, though, is that we've found our society in a vicious circle that seems very difficult to break out of.

"Education" is merely the product created to conceal the babysitting and career ticketing. It is also created out of the scarcity model that Aaron talked about. Like health care, education is now a product delivered to the lowly (helpless) masses by certified experts (who have been schooled and career-ticketed to do this).

I have found it very hard to escape the grasp of Education. It permeates everything. Even in a radical household like mine, the pressure of chopping up life into school subjects, as Aaron expressed, is very great. I have never once mentioned to my son, "Now we're going to do math." Yet when he plays a computer game he is keenly aware which school subject it represents. The computer game company is loudly making that very clear. In addition, friends both in and out of the homeschooling community are constantly asking questions of him and of my wife and me that use the terminology of "educationese." I try not to cringe when someone mentions books like *What Every 5th Grader Should Know*. Even after we inform a person that my son is homeschooled, quite often they follow that with "What grade are you in?" That's educationese.

Further, many of us, even in the homeschooling community, are orienting our lives around aiming for a certain human finished product – a young person who can take his or her place in our current society. But wait a minute. If, as Aaron questioned, we have major, fundamental issues with our current society, why continue to feed that? How would this society of economic fear, scarcity, competitiveness, materialism, etc., ever change? Surely it won't if parents continue to prepare their kids to take their place in this kind of society.

There is no truer statement than "what we prepare for is what we get." Or the longer version: "If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always gotten."

"Education reform" is most definitely not the answer. We can tweak this or modify that, but it's still a product which is aiming for the perpetuation of the status quo. If you don't want to eat soup, changing the spices in the soup to make it taste better will not change that it's still soup. In author Daniel Quinn's lingo, education reform amounts to improving prison conditions. It's time to talk about leaving the prison!

The way to do that is simple, in one sense. Yet this way is so radical that most people won't really consider it. John Holt once wrote that everything he advocated could come down to two words: trust children. Aaron mentioned this concept in his piece as well. I admit that I go in and out of trusting my son. I need to read writings (including my own!) and meet other people who espouse this idea so that I can be constantly re-inspired. Otherwise, I often fall into the trap of not trusting my son.

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Our society is very far from being able to trust children, yet it seems to me that doing so is the way to leave the double prison of schooling and education. More than that, we also don't trust life. This is what we're really afraid of. We don't trust life to treat kindly and decently children who have been trusted to choreograph their own lives.

It's just too scary for most people. Perhaps if enough of us talk about this, we can begin to turn the tide. If someone asks me how my son's education is going, I can answer something like, "He's not getting an education" or "We don't think in those terms; we're just living life and exploring what we wish." (I often go into more details and reasons if they need more reassurance that I'm not committing child neglect.) All I can do is be one person who is expressing this point of view as openly and unabashedly as I can (I want to get over sometimes being shy about it). It's wonderful to hear about others thinking this way, too. Thank you, GWS – and may GWE be more and more a part of GWS.

Query: Should There Be Groups Just for Older Kids?

Laurie Evans of New York writes:

I would like to see the following topic discussed in GWS: Have older homeschoolers wanted or needed groups just for themselves, academically or socially? How has this worked when a younger sibling then feels excluded? I thought the goal of homeschooling was to foster cooperation and not have age boundaries, but our older child wants to meet just with older children and our younger one feels left out. I should add that some of the older kids are our younger child's closest homeschooling friends. Although he enjoys younger children and people of all ages, due to his athletic ability he has always preferred to spend more time with the older children, so this makes him feel especially excluded now. I would like to hear from parents *and* children about this. ◆

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FOCUS

Parents' Values

Is it possible for parents to tell kids what they believe it's important to do or to know, without turning those beliefs into requirements? How can parents make their values clear while also allowing kids to question those values and interpret them for themselves?

A Conversation with Nancy Gruver

Nancy Gruver is the publisher of *New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams.*

Susannah Sheffer: On the "care about girls" email listserv that you and I both participate in, a question came up about a girl who wanted to become a cheerleader. Her mother was upset because the whole idea of cheerleading went counter to the mother's values – she didn't want her daughter to be focusing so much on her appearance, in particular. Most people who responded to the mother sympathized with her worries but said that it was important to let the girl do this because it was clearly part of her own exploring and if the mother forbade her to do it, the girl would end up resenting that her mother was imposing her values without regard for the daughter's own inclinations.

When you wrote your response, you gave what I thought was a fascinating and important mixture: you agreed that it was appropriate to let the girl find her own way in this regard, but you also said that you thought it was possible for parents to let their kids know what they believe is important – to make that really clear – but to do that without simply requiring or forbidding. You said it was possible for parents to be themselves while also letting their children be themselves.

That's what I want to explore here. How do you think parents can express what they believe is important without having the kids necessarily experience it as a requirement or an imposition of will?

Nancy Gruver: First of all, I think parents let kids know what they think is important all the time, whether we mean to or not. Our values, our beliefs, our hopes, our desires, our needs, our baggage from the past, all that is always there in what we choose to do, how we act, what we do or don't spend time or money on. So that, to me, is the most pervasive way we influence our children: by who we are and how we live.

But I admit that for me as a parent, sometimes just "who I am" isn't enough. Sometimes I have doubts or insecurities about whether my kids are really noticing me and my values, and so I feel I need to be really explicit about certain things. I'm fortunate that often enough my kids ask me questions about the very things I want to talk to them about, so things can come up directly. For example, one of my daughters will often start a conversation after she has read a letter to the editor in the newspaper. She'll ask me what I think, or start talking about what she thinks, and that leads to a conversation. But politics is an area where my husband Joe and I have really shied away from telling the kids to think a certain way or hold a particular opinion. We have strong opinions and often we want our kids to understand what those opinions are, but we also want them to have their own strong opinions, whatever they are.

What's harder, of course, is when we believe something is important and ought to be done but the kids don't agree.

SS: What's an example of that?

NG: When the girls were young – about 9 or 10 – we debated the thank-you-note question. They had no trouble with the idea that it was important to thank someone for a gift, but the issue was about whether it's necessary to thank them in writing or whether saying it on the phone is good enough. They couldn't believe anyone would really care whether they got thanked on the phone or in a note. I said, "To me the difference is very important, and I don't think you can fully understand it because you've never yet been in the position of being the aunt or the grandmother who sends a gift." I said it was a matter of the extra effort and of giving the person something in writing that they could keep and cherish. The girls began to understand the difference when they thought about how excited they were when they got any kind of real mail of their own. They realized that that did feel special to them. And so I made the connection there and told them that according to my values, thanking someone by writing a note is somehow more special, more appreciative, and ends up meaning more to the other person. I was asking them to consider what would be important to someone else, which I think is a big part of what kids gradually learn as they grow.

SS: What makes it possible for a child to feel she can ask "why" in that situation, when you the parent are saying something is important?

NG: I think that starts early. It goes back to the very first "whys" that kids are asking when they're starting to talk. Those early questions are usually about the concrete world: how does this work, why do things happen that way. But fairly quickly they evolve into, "Why do I have to do this?" I grew up in a family where you could ask questions about intellectual things but not about emotional things, so it was important to me to let my kids ask about emotional things. It's all in the little opportunities: how you answer when they do ask, and also whether they see *you* asking questions about why things are the way they are.

SS: So when they asked why it was important to write thank you notes, were you able to explain why you believed it was important?

NG: Yes, but they also said, "Well, *you* don't write thank you notes." I said, "Good point! You're right." I realized I had taken on the attitude, which had come from my childhood, that children write thank you notes but adults don't. I realized that I wasn't carrying out my own values in this case, because here I was saying to them that my values included the idea that thanking someone in writing is a more appreciative and lasting way of doing it, yet I myself was not thanking people in writing. So having to explain myself to my kids made me clarify why I did believe this was important and then reminded me to live in accordance with that value myself.

SS: Suppose a child asks you why, and you realize you can't think of a good reason?

NG: We have had plenty of those times, where I give an answer and they look at me and say, "Why?" again, just as incredulous as before. The thing to do then is to try to stop and really consider what I'm saying – that is, if I'm not too much on a roll already with all my reasons and arguments, or if I'm not too defensive because the issue is somehow upsetting or frightening to me.

SS: Do you think backing down in that kind of situation makes a parent look bad?

NG: I don't think so. It depends on why you're backing down. If you're backing down because you have in fact been persuaded by your child's argument, that's one thing. But if you're backing down because you don't want your child to be angry with you, that's a whole different story and it can be more damaging.

SS: Sometimes it may be hard because you find that there is no clear reason why something is important to you – it just somehow does matter to you.

NG: I think in those circumstances it's important to just keep being honest. Just admit how you actually do feel. I would try to say how I felt not through a lecture but through telling a story that shows how my experiences relate to my values. Then my children can figure out what sense to make of the story. Telling stories also helps me to understand myself better.

SS: What if in the end the child ends up saying, "OK, so it's important to you, but it isn't to me"?

NG: Then it boils down to, how important is the value you're holding? There are some things I have been willing to be prescriptive about, to say, "This is so important that it's non-negotiable." When our girls were learning to drive, for example, there were things we talked about – matters of safety, and what to do if this or that happens. It's easier to see what's non-negotiable when it comes to these more obviously essential things. But I still wouldn't say it in terms of a simple, "Because I said so." I feel that when you're saying it that way, you're not able to respect your child at the same time.

SS: And then the line between what is obviously essential and what isn't certainly gets blurry.

NG: Yes, I think a big part of what we are challenged to do as parents is figure out what we do believe is essential, and why. If your teenager asks you why it's important to know how to drive safely, it's easy to answer. But if the question is, "Why is it essential to know algebra?", it's much less clear.

SS: And people will have different answers.

NG: I think the important thing is to let those questions happen and realize that we don't have to be frightened by not knowing. We can work together with our children to figure it out. We can say we believe something is important, they can ask why, we can offer a reason, and maybe that shows them something or at least helps them understand us better, or maybe we find out we don't have as good a reason as we thought we did. Either way, we're working to figure things out together. I have learned more from being a parent than from any other part of my life. I have also given more of myself than in any other area. So in that way, being a parent is both self-centered and giving, at the same time.

A Conversation with David Colfax

David Colfax is the author, along with his wife Micki, of *Homeschooling for Excellence* and *Hard Times in Paradise.*

Susannah Sheffer: How do parents express to kids what they believe it's important to do or to know?

David Colfax: First, by example. That's pretty obvious, but one of the problems nowadays is that most kids don't have the opportunity to see their parents in a wide range of situations. Beyond direct example, though, I think parents can talk a lot about values, but not in the sense of saying, "We're going to have a discussion about values." It's a matter of taking advantage of situations that come up – when something comes on the news, when somebody stops by, all these daily situations provide the opportunity to discuss what's important, what's not so important, what's good about what's going on, what's not so good. And parents have to treat kids with respect and appreciation so that they don't just talk down to them in these discussions.

I have a feeling that most kids don't know how their parents feel about politics, economics, all the things that are crucial to how one makes one's way in life. I think homeschooling kids are likely to be around their parents much more, and interacting in a direct and dynamic way, so they may be more likely to know what their parents think and believe about a variety of things. But even there, sometimes I'm surprised by what people haven't brought up, what they haven't talked about with their kids. A parent may bring up an issue with me, and I'll say, "Have you talked to your kids about that?" They'll say, "No, I hadn't even thought about that."

SS: So there are many ways for parents to let kids know what they believe is important. How does this fit with the idea of kids having freedom to learn what they want to learn?

DC: I think the idea that homeschooling means the freedom to learn what you want to learn is a good one. But kids should understand that freedom is both an opportunity and a responsibility. It can be very dangerous. This is part of the discussion I think families can have, not just at the beginning of homeschooling but regularly, as part of an ongoing dialogue. I don't think there's anything that has to be learned at any particular time, but it's also important to understand the connections between things and the consequences of not learning something. If you don't like math, that's fine for now, but there may be some consequences later on. If you want to do certain things, you will need math to do them. Now, I really don't mean that parents should fall into a lecture about this. Rather, I mean take it as an opportunity to talk about why math is out there. Why do some people think it's important? Are they just stupid for thinking so? Is it just for people who want to grow up to be engineers? Or what? These are the kinds of things that can be explored. Why is something important, and to whom, and for what circumstances.

SS: What did you mean when you said freedom can be dangerous?

DC: Because you have an opportunity to take all kinds of risks. What I'm referring to is that it's psychologically dangerous. It throws up a whole set of circumstances that are very likely going to be challenged at one point or another. If you go off on your own way, that's dangerous just because being a noncomformist in this society can have its consequences. And those consequences can be interesting or funny or can scare parents away from proceeding. Micki and I find ourselves saying to parents, "It's all right, it's all right, don't worry." I understand why parents need that affirmation. Our situation was somewhat different because when our children were young, homeschooling wasn't as organized and self-conscious as it is today. We weren't sure how it would turn out but we were engaged in what we thought was a great adventure. I say that thinking of those books you see in classrooms called "Adventures in Literature" and "Adventures in Mathematics." Educators love to use that word but often the kids don't find it an adventure at all! Our homeschooling adventure felt like a real adventure.

SS: It seems to me that part of that adventure could be precisely the dialogue you were describing earlier: all that conversation between parents and kids about what is important and why. That's an interesting kind of relationship to have with one's children.

DC: Yes, it's interesting when you can say what you think is important and the kids can ask why or tell you that they don't agree. Then you have to figure out what you think and why you think it. And the parent has to be prepared to be out-argued.

SS: What if you get asked why something is important and you find that you can't really defend it?

DC: That's where you have to be prepared to simply back off. There are things in every family that are important, but there are a whole lot of things that are probably not really so important at that particular point in time. If I say, "It's really important that you learn to play the violin," and the child asks why, maybe I say, "Because I love violin music" and the child says "But I don't." Or maybe my reason is, "Because it shows you're a cultured person," and the child says, "But I don't care what other people think of me." Maybe in that case the parent is able to say, "OK, this isn't so important."

SS: Because what the child is really saying there is, "It's important to you, but not to me."

DC: That's why it's important to be open about it, to say, "You're right, this really has nothing to do with your life; it has more to do with mine." But ideally that shouldn't be the end of an exasperated effort on the parent's part. Ideally it should be in a situation where you can really stand back and have a conversation about it. I would hope there would be a dynamic between parent and child that had a give and take, rather than one where the parent is being didactic.

SS: Did you ever say something specific to your kids, like, "I think it's important to write clearly"?

DC: Sometimes we would pick up our weekly community paper, and quite often there would be a page of poetry. I might say, "This is really awful, how can that person think he's a poet," but then maybe one of the kids would say, "Who cares whether they're good? They're engaged in self-expression," and we'd be off talking about that.

In another context I might say, "You have the right to write however and whatever you want, but when it comes to communicating with other people, making an effort to be clear is a way of showing consideration for others." I have seen so many pieces of writing - brochures, letters – where you can tell the writer didn't bother to revise. I think that puts a hardship on the person who will be reading it. It shows a lack of understanding of why it's important to communicate.

SS: That could be an interesting way to make the point to the child. You're not just saying "it's important" in some abstract way; you're talking about how it affects other people.

DC: Some aspects of writing are a presentation of self, too. But if you don't care about how people respond to you, that's another matter.

But there are all kinds of things that are only important if you care about them. Take Grant's goats, for example. My oldest son Grant, at the age of 34, is right now at the state fair with his mother. He's just totally obsessed; it's like he's 13 or 14 again. It's the running joke in our family. There's his obsession with goats, and mine with politics — but the point is, a kid should have great projects, great commitments, but we don't all have to learn the same things. Is it important to know all the generals who led battles in the Civil War? Well, if you're interested in what it means to be a general, or what that war was all about, there are things you can read about that. But just knowing the names of the generals?

SS: In school, the immediate reason it's important to know something is that you'll get a bad grade if you don't. Parents might feel sometimes that it would be easier just to be able to say, "Because I said so."

DC: And the parent may be afraid that at some later point the child will come to them and say, "Why didn't you tell me this was important?" I think the idea has to be that homeschooling is a work in progress. It's constantly getting reviewed.

SS: You said the parent has to be prepared to be out-argued. Did that ever happen in your family, where you loved something or thought something was important and the kids didn't?

DC: Our kids are deficient in two areas: musical education and artistic style. None of them can draw well and none of them showed any interest in playing a musical instrument – with the exception of Reed, our third son. Part of that comes directly from the fact that I had a lot of musical education and never really enjoyed it; it was always something I was doing for somebody else. But I loved jazz as a teenager. I couldn't believe, when my kids were teenagers, that not a one had ever shown any interest in jazz. It just did not excite them. That surprised me, because to me, jazz was part of our culture, it was worth knowing. In fact, jazz would probably be a good metaphor for our homeschooling – I'm just thinking of this now! – because the idea is that you're improvising constantly, you're doing your riffs, but it takes a certain amount of competence, and you're not sure how people will react.

Anyway, for a long time the kids had no interest in jazz. But now Drew and Reed are way beyond me in their appreciation of jazz. By the time they were around 20 they had massive jazz collections. How did that happen? Well, I think it just took a while for them to take to it, to come to an understanding of it.

With drawing, I think the kids were kind of intimidated. They felt it was Dad's thing. They were never much around other artists who inspired them, and the fact that I did it wasn't enough to make them want to. But there are trade-offs. They have skills in other areas.

Another example would be Drew and graduate school. When Drew graduated from college, he told his mother that he was thinking of going to graduate school. He told her first because he knew how negatively I felt about academia. But when he told me he was doing it, I just said, "Great, I hope you're ready to deal with it." He really felt that he wanted to become a biological anthropologist, and he got into a prestigious program. Well, it took him one year in that department and then he announced that he was not going to take the National Science Foundation fellowship he had been offered. Instead, he was going to leave academia and go off in another direction. He came to me and said, "Dad, you were right." Now, it hadn't been something I would argue with him about. He was an adult, and he had his reasons for what he wanted to do. And to his credit, he wasn't willing to just buy into his father's experience. He had to try it for himself.

SS: That can be very important, even at a much younger age. But it's also interesting to realize how much kids *are* ultimately listening to what their parents say is important.

DC: And yet you can't predict where your kids will end up. Your value system will very likely be carried forward, but it may be in a form you won't recognize at first. That's where we get into that area of risk that I mentioned earlier. We're not trying to create clones of ourselves here. At least, I hope we're not. And none of this comes with a guarantee. I think it's helpful to approach homeschooling with a good sense of humor, be prepared for pratfalls, for things to go badly, and after the initial shock you can step back and laugh at what's happened. Probably everything that is out there is worth learning in some context, for some people, some time. We're constantly sorting out what's important today as compared to yesterday. So all this is serious but it's not deadly serious. ◆

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Homeschool Resource Centers

A Conversation with Ken Danford and Joshua Hornick

Ken and Joshua are the directors of Pathfinder Learning Center, a resource center for homeschooling teenagers in the Amherst, Massachusetts area. Now in its fourth year, Pathfinder serves as a social meeting place, offers classes and activities, and helps teenagers and their parents work through the challenges and issues that come up as they make the transition to self-directed learning. Members pay an annual fee of $1500; those unable to pay that fee can reduce it by helping with Pathfinder's fundraising efforts.

Susannah Sheffer: Three years ago you were two middle school teachers dissatisfied with your jobs. When you left to create something else, why did you decide to create a resource center for homeschoolers instead of an alternative school?

Ken Danford: Creating a school wouldn't have addressed the concerns we had as teachers: having to deal with a curriculum, having a preset notion of what kids would have to learn. And if we opened a private school, the tuition would be rather expensive for the families. We wanted something that would be affordable — something that any of our students who wanted to leave with us could decide to join.

SS: It's interesting that you say "who wanted to leave with us." You started Pathfinder with the idea that your particular students might choose to leave school as you did?

KD: It's critical to understand that Pathfinder was developed to make homeschooling an appealing and successful option for kids who were still in school. We knew a lot of kids in school who we believed would benefit from another approach. Our main goal wasn't to collect all the homeschoolers who were already out there and have them join us, although of course they were welcome as well (there weren't too many in this area, though). From the very beginning, we were about helping people choose to be in control of their education.

SS: As you were making plans to leave teaching, did you tell your students what you were going to do?

Joshua Hornick: We were very careful not to be actively soliciting kids. We didn't say anything in any forceful way; we just let kids know what we were doing. We never told kids they *should* leave school. A few of them did leave and join us, but most of our current members of Pathfinder were not actually Ken's or my students in school.

KD: We never recruited kids, never even cajoled. In fact, I think most of my students had enough misconceptions about homeschooling that they just thought it was kind of goofy. I was going to tutor homeschooled kids, is how they thought of it. They didn't realize it had any meaning to them.

JH: When kids would ask, "Why are you leaving?" I would say, "Because it makes me crazy to be here. I get the feeling most of you would just as soon not be here, and I'm uncomfortable having to watch over you like that." But as Ken said, not too many students left school right then. Subsequently many did leave, but Pathfinder has caught on by word of mouth rather than because we urged kids to leave.

KD: Three years ago we started out with 20 or 25 kids. We moved up to 40 or so and had over 50 at one point.

SS: What do kids get with a resource center that they wouldn't get with a school?

JH: The real question is what they get from homeschooling that they don't get from school, and you and your readers know the answer to that as well as we do. But from another perspective, starting up a resource center is a lot less work than starting a school. Schools are required to play a custodial role, so you're in a situation where you have to be watching the kids all day long. Here at Pathfinder, the kids come and go as they choose. Most come in only two or three times a week and not for the whole day.

KD: And with very rare exceptions, schools make kids learn certain material. Pathfinder supports parents and kids to make their own decisions. Another question is, what is the difference between homeschooling with Pathfinder and without. I think the difference is simply that we make certain things easier. We provide a critical mass of people and of energy, for certain kids of field trips, classes, and activities. We certainly know lots of people who homeschool successfully without Pathfinder. Some people join, discover they don't need us that much, and leave.

JH: The other thing is the support services we provide for the family. We meet with families and help them develop their plans and help them review on a regular basis – are they doing what they wanted to do? At least twice a year we sit down with every family and talk about which of their goals are being met, which aren't, if there's disagreement between parents and kids, how should you go about trying to deal with the problems and support the successes. I perceive that service as extremely valuable to some families and at least moderately valuable to all of them.

KD: Some of those meetings are valuable even to families who have been homeschooling successfully for years. Just to have a brainstorming session or a counseling session can be helpful.

SS: Do other people have trouble distinguishing Pathfinder from a school?

KD: Almost everybody has trouble. My parents say, "Ken's school." They think that since we're teachers, and we have these kids coming here, that's a school.

SS: What about the families you work with? Do they understand the difference between a resource center and a school, or do they sometimes expect you to do what a school would do?

KD: A teenager might say to his friends, "I go to Pathfinder," because that's easier to say. But in the beginning when we talk to families, we do have to make it clear what we will and won't do. We won't make teenagers learn certain things, we won't hold them accountable, we won't be taskmasters. At some opening meetings with parents, they may think we're going to "do the homeschooling for them."

JH: But to our credit, I do think we make it pretty clear at the outset what we are not and what we won't do.

KD: Some kids may begin homeschooling expecting us to make them do math, and then when we don't make them, they don't do it, and they end up resenting us for the fact that they didn't learn it.

SS: So they're really thinking in school terms, then.

Does Pathfinder make it possible for people to homeschool who wouldn't have otherwise?

JH: It makes the transition much easier. The families have a clearer idea of what to expect and they have people they can turn to when they're unsure. At first when people look at us, what they see that's attractive is all the activities and the fact that we are a place where kids can come and hang out together. But often they come to realize that the family support we offer is equally important.

KD: The social scene here is very attractive for teenagers coming out of school, too. And both parents and kids like the idea of the kids having an opportunity to learn in groups, but with the chance to choose what groups to be in. That's possible here in a way that it isn't at school. Of course, homeschool support groups also offer classes and activities, but having a permanent and centrally located place is very appealing. Kids know they can just drop in and see who's here today, what's going on. And then it's also very easy to leave, which is important.

JH: When people ask us about setting up a center for teenagers, we always stress the importance of having it in an accessible location where there are places for the kids to go if they leave. If the center is far away and only accessible by car, and the kids aren't driving yet, they'll have to get dropped off and they won't be able to leave until their parents pick them up. At Pathfinder, kids can walk out of here and be right in the center of Amherst with the library, coffee houses, pizza places, stores, and many other places to go.

SS: Pathfinder provides a center for teenagers to be together, and you also focus a lot on helping teengers get out into the wider community through volunteer work and apprenticeships. In your experience, which do teenagers crave more – a specifically "teen space," or the chance to be more fully integrated into the community?

KD: I think it's a false dichotomy; both are important. And in fact there are adults coming into Pathfinder all the time too, so it isn't really a secluded teenage hangout. Most of the kids don't come in every day, so they're clearly off doing other things. We're closed one day a week to encourage people to find a life elsewhere if they haven't already, because we did feel there was a small group, maybe five or ten kids, who were relying on Pathfinder too much.

SS: Why have a center specifically for teenagers and not just a resource center for the whole community?

KD: Because we're focusing on the particular importance of independent learning during adolescence, and because we had been teaching adolescents and that's where our concern was. But I can see that we could expand into being a lifetime learning center. I have fantasies of hooking up with the senior center here – maybe having history discussions linked with them.

JH: We had a senior citizen who came regularly to one of our science classes.

SS: This may sound obvious, but I know it isn't obvious to everyone: why do you think teenagers *want* to be doing things like apprenticeships? After all, these days schools and even juvenile courts often *require* community service, implying that it's a kind of medicine that's good for young people but that they wouldn't choose on their own.

KD: I think people want to be really good at something, and also to do something meaningful, something that matters. Sure, it might seem like kids in school would rather lounge around than do anything else, but I don't think people are really happy just lounging around for long periods of time. In school, their energy is taken up with things they don't really care about, and then they don't have much energy left over. I felt that way when I was teaching. When I came home, it was hard for me to read challenging books or do volunteer work. I'd just watch TV. Now, I don't watch TV anymore and I read a lot, because I enjoy what I'm doing during the day. When people are happy with their lives and feel in control, they have more energy.

SS: What about the adults that all these teenagers are working with? Another thing that I've found is not obvious to many people is simply that there are enough adults who will be welcoming to kids who want to help out.

JH: At the beginning, we kept a file of people in the community interested in providing mentorships or internships. We had about 80 cards, and if we'd promoted it we easily could have had 300 cards. It drove home to me the point that adults in the community are hurt just as much from having kids secreted away in schools as the kids are, because the adults don't have the opportunity to mentor and teach unless they are full-time teachers. We had many more adults offering to be mentors than kids who could take them up on it. And those teenagers who did have apprenticeships were finding their opportunities in other ways and didn't need our file as much as we had expected. Most families set up their own apprenticeships by thinking of people they know.

SS: What's especially hard for families about adjusting to the freedom of homeschooling?

KD: Letting go of the idea that there are many things that everyone should know and that you should spend most of your time pursuing those things.

JH: And kids have to learn how to structure their time. Sometimes that means setting goals and sometimes it means establishing consequences for oneself if the goals aren't met. But notice I said "for oneself." We feel strongly that if the parent is setting up the consequences for the child, you don't get nearly as positive an outcome. Last spring I was meeting with a family who was having a problem with the 14-year-old girl staying up until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning on computer chat lines. She was mature enough to see that this wasn't good for her, because there were things she wanted to be doing in the mornings and she couldn't get up for them. Identifying it that way – that there were things she wanted to do but couldn't do because of staying up so late – made a big difference. Then I asked the girl what she thought she could do to get to sleep earlier. She said, "I'll set a limit for myself for midnight, and if I don't keep it, I won't use the computer the next day."

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A Publicly Funded Center

HomeSource in Oregon is a state-funded resource center for homeschoolers. Paula Praus-Williamson, one of the founders, explains how it works:

Three years ago, a couple of other parents and I got together and began meeting with people in our school district to discuss creating something that would serve homeschool students. The district was open to having students sign up for classes or use the library, but we wanted something more. We worked with Kent Hunsaker, the superintendent of the Bethel School District in Eugene, Oregon, and developed a proposal to bring to the state Department of Education for a resource center that would serve homeschool students on a part-time basis.

At that time, before the more recent charter school laws, Oregon had laws that allowed public alternative schools and private alternative education programs. We fall into the latter category, which means we are able to hire our own instructors (and they can be certified teachers or not). The center is governed by a board of seven families who have children there. We set our own wages. So we're pretty autonomous. We have a contract with the school district that requires us to be audited and generally to share with them what's going on, but the main requirement is that we serve 60% of the registered homeschoolers in the district. Because we're the only thing like this in the area, we actually serve homeschoolers all over the county, from about 16 districts. We had 503 homeschooled students at the end of the last year, and this year, our fourth, I think we'll probably have over 600 students.

Our funding comes through the state and flows through the school district. We receive all but $100 of the basic school support – that's the amount that the state gives each student in school. But I believe we are very different from a school in many ways. The families are homeschooling families first and foremost, and we are there to support them. The parents have to comply with the homeschooling law just as if they weren't using our center. The classes we offer are 1 1/2 hours a week and students can attend as few or as many as they want. Most attend an average of four hours a week, so right away that's very different from going to school. We don't require any classes. A family might have a year when they're going through a lot and are finding it very difficult to teach much at home, so they'll decide to take more classes here. Then at another point they might scale back and say, we want to be at home more. Or they might just do swimming and tennis with us and nothing else. All this means that the students are there because they want to be. And we don't give grades or provide transcripts. The teachers do evaluations at the end, and because the Oregon law requires that homeschoolers take standardized tests, we offer that as well.

Another big difference is that up through eighth

(Continued next page)

SS: It's interesting because I bet that if the parents had come up with exactly that rule, she would have been more likely to resent it.

JH: Right, but since she thought of it for herself, it worked, or at least we never heard about the problem again. When kids are in school, kids often perceive their parents as the enforcers for the school, and we've seen that in homeschooling the kids and parents can feel much more that they're working together rather than working against each other.

KD: Another hard thing about adjusting to freedom can be not valuing what does get done. If a teenager learns a new instrument or writes a whole lot of poetry, people may say, "Yeah, but he didn't do anything else." There can be a tendency to devalue what was done and focus on what wasn't done.

I think in general that the value of the first year of homeschooling is learning how to structure your life and figure out something you love to do. But sometimes people have bigger problems in their lives than education. If a teenager is depressed or has stress from other sources, those problems need to be addressed first.

JH: Or as part of the homeschooling.

KD: We had one girl here who, in a very short period, had to deal with an enormous amount of stress. She had a whole slew of family deaths, friends committing suicide – it seemed that there was a drama of real significance every time we saw her. I think for her, being out of school was essential to her being able to process all this and keep her spirits up. She was able to have a close relationship with her mother during it all, which was very important. I don't see how she could have carried the full load of schoolwork and done well amidst all these tragedies. She's a wonderful young woman who has a lot of plans for her life.

Then there's an example that is sort of the opposite of this: a young man who came out of school fairly undirected and pretty unhappy. In our meetings, he told us he basically likes to be left alone with no pressure on him. Mostly he comes here and hangs out and gets involved in some social activities. He doesn't want to challenge himself, and he says he likes it that way. His parents are a bit concerned, to say the least. But that's where he is. We're not able to put a life together for him, though we do offer him many things. He smiles and says no thank you. I think there may be some issues about his feelings about himself and his past – I don't even know all of it – that would have to get resolved before he is ready to accept those kinds of challenges.

JH: There are those who say he should be forced to be in school and made to learn things. I have a strong sense that if he were in school he would become very antisocial because he would be told he was no good all the time.

It's very hard for parents, too, when everything they hear about their child is negative. One woman who spoke with us on the telephone began crying and said, "You mean you're not going to call me up and tell me what my daughter's doing wrong?"

SS: What do you think teenagers need adults for?

JH: I think in a healthy family, kids need their parents for something all the way up until their parents pass on. Of course, the need decreases through the years, but it's still there.

KD: The need for direct oversight decreases, but teenagers certainly need support and encouragement and challenges. They don't need *orders* – that's the difference. And they need reassurance that they're OK, that their feelings about their lives and, in this case, their dissatisfaction with school makes sense. At Pathfinder, kids want to know that we believe in them. Few adults will tell a teenager that it's a good idea to leave school.

JH: We talk with kids here all the time. I think teenagers tend to benefit a great deal from a caring uncle such as we are to them, someone who's not

grade, parents attend the classes with their children. (We serve K through 12.) We felt that this was a good idea because that way the parents don't expect us to be responsible for their child's education and the classes feel much more like a part of the family's homeschooling. The parents know what's going on and they can continue with the same learning or the same projects during the rest of the week. I teach computer technology here, and parents are there learning right along with the students. In classes where there's room, we also allow parents to bring in the younger siblings, so we sometimes have babies and toddlers here as well.

We do have many parents who work and many single parents. In those cases, they can designate a grandparent or someone else to be in the class with their child. We have single parents on staff too, whose children are here with them daily.

We operate in the basement of a church, but we're working on a fund to raise money for our own building someday. As long as you're not teaching religion – and we're not – you can operate a school or educational program in a church. We're open from 8 to 5, and because the kids all come part time, it works. You need a much bigger facility when you are having to keep that many kids in the same place full time. Our facilities make it possible to have seven classes going on at once, and there are about ten kids in a class. We have off-site classes as well. We rent out a church gym to do indoor soccer and volleyball, we contract with a place for swimming and tennis, we use the elementary school gym for swing dance.

Another advantage of being set up as a resource center is that we can hire people who wouldn't otherwise be available to teach full time. We can hire the local meteorologist to teach about weather or a local artist to teach art.

In the beginning, families who used the center were families who had been homeschooling already. But as we became known, we attracted people who had wanted to homeschool but felt they didn't have the resources. It's interesting: Oregon has a lot of underground homeschoolers, maybe because of the testing requirement, but many who had been underground decided to comply with the law in order to use our center. I understand the perspective of people who say they don't want to register with the state because they don't want the state's intrusion. At the same time, I think it makes sense that, because our center is state funded, you have to be registered legally in order to use it. When you use our center you *are* taking advantage of something that is supported by state funds.

In addition to offering classes, HomeSource also gives information about homeschooling to callers. We give out numbers of local support groups, give information about the law, suggest catalogs and web sites and library ideas. We provide a bulletin board for parents to sell their curriculum materials to each other. Although we don't have space to have a library here at the center, my idea is that we are working more and more toward being a clearinghouse.

HomeSource, PO Box 40884, Eugene OR 97404, phone 541-689-9959, fax 541-689-1051, web site www.betheltech.com

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the parent but who can give them adult advice. We're just two more adults that they can talk about life with, as they're starting to get a sense of being adults themselves.

SS: What about the reverse: what do you as adults get out of spending so much time with teenagers?

KD: I get a lot of satisfaction out of helping young people feel in control of their lives. It's satisfying to do it and to see the changes in them.

JH: Most of the kids here are extremely idealistic and fun to be with. It just feels great to spend time with them.

Sharing Materials through a Center in Ohio

As we go to press in September, the Home Education Resource Center of Central Ohio has just opened. Belinda Augustus, one of the founders of the center, explains its goals:

About seven of us form the core group of homeschoolers that have gotten this Resource Center going. Our main idea was to provide a way for homeschoolers to have access to books and materials, especially those that it would be too expensive for a family to purchase individually. We wanted to have available the kinds of materials that a family might just use once or occasionally – microscopes, skeletons, expensive items like that.

Many organizations have materials, equipment, and curriculums that they are giving out for free to schools, but they aren't as receptive to giving them to a homeschooling family because they would rather know that the materials were being used by a larger group. As a resource center, we can assure the donors that their materials will be used by a large group of children. Most of the materials in our library have been donated from corporations and foundations. Some science foundations have given us huge science kits, for example. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has materials that they're willing to just hand out to a group, so that's another example. Other materials have come from families who used something once and now no longer need it. Yet another way we get materials for the library is through families' participation in book clubs like Scholastic and Carnival. We collect bonus points from them and then are able to turn around and purchase something else. Finally, we are able to get free samples from homeschool vendors because we offer to keep their catalogs available with the sample. In the future, we may decide to purchase high-cost items and then rent them out at a very low cost – say, $5 a use – until they're paid for.

Before opening the Resource Center, we had been running a homeschool library with books and materials out of my home. It was outgrowing my home and it was difficult to keep it organized. We thought it would be wonderful to have this lending library available in a more accessible space.

The other reason for wanting a Resource Center was to have a place that could house our support group meetings and classes and workshops. Libraries and recreation centers have been supportive and many homeschoolers' meetings have been held in those places, but we've found that it's a low priority for them. The library might easily bump the monthly homeschoolers' meeting if the space was needed for something else.

For all these reasons, we thought that having a regular space just for us would be a wonderful way of providing support to homeschoolers. This way, all the resources will be right there, including homeschooling magazines, legal information, and the chance to tap into a network of others. We've heard that homeschoolers who return their children to school generally do so within two years, and it's our contention that it's because they haven't tapped into a community. We wanted to make that easier.

That's the reason we chose such a simple name for the center. A lot of names got discussed, but the straightforward name won out because we wanted people to be able to look in the phone book under "Homeschool" and find us right away.

Finding a space was of course the

big challenge. At first we thought of rehabbing an old building, but that would have been a great deal of work. Finally we found an old school building that is rented out to various groups – a preschool, church groups, etc. When we were figuring out how to support our center financially, we decided that active members – people regularly attending classes and workshops – will pay $10 a month. If you're just coming to support group meetings or sitting in the reading room and reading, we don't charge for that. We have members outside the immediate area as well, and they pay $30 a year for borrowing privileges from the library. Then if they want to take a class or workshop, they'll just donate a couple of dollars at that time.

Our rent is $550 a month including utilities, so we knew that we would need 55 families paying the active member rate to make this work. I looked at how many families were actively using the library when it was at my house and I decided it was likely we would find enough people. We're going into it with close to 40 families signed up, and since I'm getting about one call a day right now, I feel confident that as the school year begins and the word spreads, we will find the remaining families we need.

The space we have is one large room, a former office, with partitions so that one end is the library, another has chairs and a carpet for the babies to crawl on, and the other area is a large open space for classes and workshops. We have a regular weekly Spanish class scheduled, as well as a photography project and a geography club that will prepare for the National Geographic Bee. We are fortunate to have two talented science instructors among our parents who will give hands-on workshops. One does zoology and the other does physics, first a family physics session where he'll show interesting experiments and then a follow-up session for older children who have some concept of algebra, in which he'll talk about the mathematics behind what they saw in the first session.

It's wonderful to have workshops that are parent-led. One of the ideas that has been the cornerstone of this resource center is that each of us possesses some talent and if we have an opportunity to share it, we can tap into it. People keep coming forward with ideas of talents they can share. But it's also important not to forget what the rest of the community can offer. There are so many wonderful programs that the community will bring into the schools, and now that we have an organized center, they are willing to bring them to us as well. Our local fire department is coming in with a program in October, and then the electric company is coming to give a demonstration.

Families can, of course, take as few or as many workshops as they want. As for the library, our rules for borrowing are that families can borrow materials for as long as they like, until a second family requests that material. Then the first family has two weeks to return it. Running the library from my home, I found that that system worked well.

The Home Education Resource Center of Central Ohio, c/o Belinda Augustus, 1713 Keeler Ct, Columbus 43227-2558, phone 614-237-0004. ◆

In Memoriam:
Alison Stallibrass

Today's homeschool resource centers owe a historical debt to the Pioneer Health Centre (also known as the Peckham Experiment), a resource center for families that existed in London in the 1930s. Peckham was a place where, as the long-time members put it, "all the family liked to be." Like the centers described in this issue, Peckham was not at all a school but instead an *unprogrammed* space where families could gather and do all kinds of things together (or simply watch and talk).

Alison Stallibrass, who was involved with the Peckham Experiment and who wrote about it in the book *Being Me and Also Us*, died on August 6, 1999. Alison was also the author of *The Self-Respecting Child*, which we sold for many years. It's fitting that in the context of a GWS feature on resource centers, we remember and appreciate Alison Stallibrass's work.

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Watching Children Learn

Growing Into Independence

Ruthe Matilsky (NJ) writes:

Jake, now 16, really started traveling about a year and a half ago when his father Terry and I finally said he could go to Montana by bus to visit a homeschooling family he knew. He stayed there for a month, going snowboarding and having a wonderful time, and he didn't mind the long bus trip. As a parent it was pretty nerve-wracking knowing he was on that first bus trip, but by now I am used to it. Last summer he took the bus to Montana again, worked on the same family's ranch for several weeks, and then got himself to Eugene, Oregon for Not Back to School Camp. After that he went up to Vancouver where he met up with another homeschooling friend, and the two of them traveled down the coast of California. A tremendous network of homeschooled teenagers is out there now and they were put up by many wonderful homeschooling families in addition to family friends. He came back in November, five months after he left.

He had been interested in photography before the trip, but he came back with a much more determined attitude about it, and he spent much of his spare time in the darkroom working with his father as well as alone. He is putting a lot of thought into photography as a vocation. Now as I write he is traveling again, lugging heavy photography equipment in his backpack and satisfying his need to see new things at the same time that he works on his photography.

Through his travels he also is getting to see close up how other families function. This is something that can be so useful – to see different family dynamics in action. I think it's helped to give him more of an appreciation for his own family. I tell people, only half jokingly, that this can be the answer to the "teenage years" – send your kid away to stay with another family for awhile. It's a way to break habits. I think, especially with Jake. I get into this role of complaining about the way he does things: I complain about his messy room, his night owl habits, the mess he leaves in the kitchen when he cooks at midnight – on and on – and it's often hard for me to see that he really is improving in these areas I'm harping on.

But when he got back from traveling this past winter he was delightful. The first thing he did on his first day home was notice that I was frazzled and announced that he was making lunch for everyone, plus the company. What a gift. The whole rest of the month was pretty much like that. It wasn't perfect, of course. But I could see that the break from being at home had done him good. He needs to be on his own and we need the space from each other. I think this is normal. When he is home he wants attention from Terry and me; Terry works with him in the darkroom and he and I make movie and lunch dates – not as many as we would like, but we do manage some.

I am pretty content that my 16-year-old son *wants* to spend time with his mother. I hear so many stories from people about their teenagers, and so far we have not encountered the negativity that people talk about. I, of course, relate this directly to homeschooling. We don't have to deal with so much that other parents have to contend with. I have always maintained that I am just as neurotic and critical as the average parent (maybe more so), but the things I deal with with my children are real. There is no pushing them to do things that are stupid.

Except maybe Driver's Ed. In GWS #126 I wrote about lobbying the Board of Education to let homeschoolers take classes at the school. Well, my wish came true, as you might recall, and this year I dutifully followed the prescribed protocol and wrote a letter requesting that Jake be able to take Driver's Ed and April (13) be able to take theater.

Jake needed to take the class so that he would be able to get a reduced rate on his insurance. He was resigned to his fate, but he hated the class. He would come home absolutely appalled at how stupid and boring it was and amazed at the kids who wouldn't be respectful enough to pay attention so the teacher could get something accomplished. They went over and over the same material – even saw the same videos more than once.

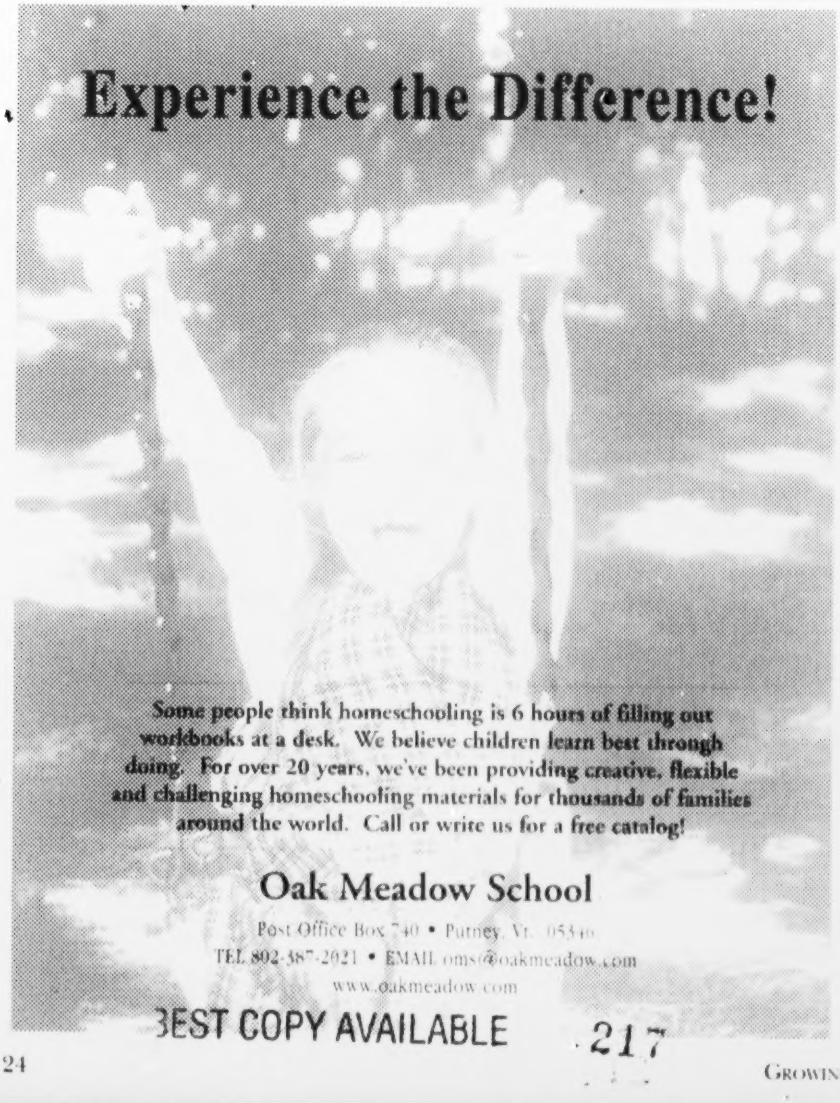
Jake complained that the class was a waste of time and interfered with the rest of his life. His social life was curtailed because he couldn't go traveling during the week and his wage-earning hours had to be scheduled around the class (it was held at 11:30 in the morning – I shudder to think how he would have reacted if it had been held at 8:30). I would listen to him complain and think to myself, here is a kid who has never been forced to do something stupid in his whole life. His time has been his own, and this is one time he has to do something the system demands, and it won't kill him. In retrospect, I think I didn't realize what it means to raise a free child. He was so indignant at the stupidity, and I have been so used to accepting stupidity, that I couldn't understand why he was so upset.

As an aside, I have to add that it didn't help that there were two other homeschoolers in the class who cut it regularly. I told Jake that his attendance in this class was a political act. I had worked hard for him to have the right to attend and I didn't want him to be responsible for messing it up for other kids who come after him. The other homeschoolers had been in school all their lives and only recently left. These are boys whose parents never would have finally decided to (broken up into many small segments).

While visiting my father in Massachusetts, Nathan was offering up a private little recital for Grampa of all the songs he's learned since March. That same day, I was asked by another family member when I would start homeschooling. The thought that was first in my mind was that I had started sometime around the day he was born. But I knew the question was about actual bookwork. And she wondered about discipline of study: did I have plans to sit down for two or three hours per day for bookwork?

What I explained was more about recognizing desires or passions, and going with those. And I explained my belief that any child, given opportunity, would get more than a simple single lesson from any given desire. An interest in violin leads to reading music, to understanding symbols, to math in rhythmic timing, to reading words in titles or songs, to history (who wrote the music?), etc. The list goes as long as the desire burns within.

Later that evening, and thus my total inspiration to share this with GWS readers, was the clarity of my thought regarding discipline (in study, not punishment). It occurred to me that it is not my job to teach discipline. Rather, it is my job not to beat it out of Nathan. This was such an enlightening concept! What baby or child does any of us know that doesn't have the discipline to keep at something that interests him or her? Learning to crawl, learning to walk, figuring out a toy. Even learning to play the violin. Anything! This drive is a child's hallmark. And how dare I "make" him sit in front of lessons to develop discipline?



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Rising Out of College

From Peter Kowalke (OH):

I'm haunted by a comment Grace Llewellyn made last spring. While I was interviewing her for an unschooling issue of my publication, *Nation Magazine*, Grace let slip that she was interested in seeing homeschoolers push further and educate themselves through college, all the way until they were accepted into post-graduate programs like medical school. A very subversive seed was planted in my mind. Why stop unschooling in college?

Grace's challenge couldn't have been more salient to my life. At the time of our conversation, I was completing my first offical year at the local community college. I had been taking classes for the past two years, first as a homeschooling high school student and then as a college student intending to transfer. Despite carving a niche for myself at Lakeland Community College – math tutor, English Student of the Year, member of the Phi Theta Kappa academic honor society – I was already dissatisfied with traditional education. I decided to transfer to Hampshire College, one of the many alternative colleges in the United States. The spirit of Grace's challenge to unschool through college spoke to my own decision not to sacrifice the organic homeschooler approach for more scholarship money or a college with a better reputation. Yet I wasn't willing to forego a degree, to take Grace literally and jump into relatively uncharted waters by unschooling my way through college. Unschooling could be great, I thought, but at a certain age everyone began attending college.

It wasn't obvious to me that in going to college, I was going to school. None of the subtle differences that made college a unique form of institutional education eliminated its inherent competition with unschooling, though I didn't realize this at first. By going to college I was, in a sense, suggesting that unschooling wasn't truly able to compete with the best institutional education money had to offer. As my unschooling friend Lauren Wales put it, by going to

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homeschool unless there was already a firm movement in place. They were able to take advantage of the widespread knowledge that exists about homeschooling today, but they didn't see themselves as part of a movement, with some obligation to others.

Back to Jake: I am thinking a lot about teenagers and responsibility. Teenagers are physically mature and ready for responsibility, and they are still being herded like sheep and forced to supress their own desires, both physical and intellectual, until they are free of school and their parents. I can remember being so angry and humiliated as a teenager because I couldn't go outside for my 22 free minutes after lunch.

One by one, my kids are turning into responsible teenagers. I think they are aware of how much control they really do have over how they spend their lives, and they have been getting the message since day one that they are expected to help the family run more smoothly – thus their sense of responsibility that leaves so many people incredulous. My friend Wendy says what a gift it is to our children to let them know we *need* their help, and I think she is right. If you know that the work you are expected to do is *necessary* work, then you may not love it, but you accept it.

About a year ago we told Matthew, our pre-teen, that it was time for him to be on the family work schedule formally. We have a rotating chore schedule (vacuuming, bathroom cleaning, dishes, dinner prep), and up until that time Matthew had not been on the schedule, but had been assigned certain other chores that weren't quite as vital. I expected him to complain about now being on the schedule, but he accepted the new responsibilities. He still needs tutoring in these various skills, but he realizes that he needs to do them, and that is really what is major.

I mention all this because I think about school teens and what they are expected to do. So much of it is not necessary. So much of it is boring without reason. And so many of their parents don't feel right about asking them to do chores around the house because the teens are overwhelmed with all the stupid and meaningless stuff they have to do for school. My kids crack up when I tell them that my mother made my bed every day for me and changed my sheets. They can't believe that I couldn't cook a meal until I was 20 years old. I could diagram a sentence, though!

Uninterested in Academics

Darlene Lester of California writes:

Our son Ben has been unschooled all his life. When he was growing up, I was amazed at how much "horse sense" he had. He could always see a better, more effective way of doing things. At age 6, when his brother was working on a car, Ben would watch and make observations and suggestions that his brother had to admit he hadn't thought of and were very helpful. And I have always felt, even when he was very young, that I'd like to have Ben with me if there was an emergency.

Academically, though, Ben was really just not interested. He didn't go for any type of paperwork. He did learn to read, at his request, at age 10, and he learned very quickly. Now he mainly reads nonfiction when he's hunting for information. At age 12 he started voluntarily working in a math book. His math study was not born of a real interest in math per se but rather of his recent interest in computers. We enrolled him in two college computer classes last semester (World Wide Web publishing and Computer Programming) and he found he needed math to do some of the work. So, out came the math book. He claims he wants to go into the computer field and has done lots of research into his options. He told me recently that he hoped I'd like to visit England because that's where he wants to work – as soon as possible!

I was a little concerned about his taking a college class with his sparse knowledge of math and writing. Was he going to get discouraged, or would his teacher "find him out" and kick him out of class? The exact opposite occurred. He rose to the challenge and learned what he needed in order to do well in class. He finished his assignments in a fraction of the time allotted and then would wander around the class offering to help those who needed it. He was labeled a whiz kid. He told me that he'd get discouraged by many of the adults' attitudes in the class. They would ask him what to do, then do it and ask "What now?" He said, "Mom, they just don't think! I don't think they're learning anything by my telling them what to do. They need to figure it out just like I did." Still, he and an older gentleman continued to help people, since the teacher was often out of the classroom, and it was a very good lesson in patience for Ben. I asked him if he learned a lot in class, and he said no. He'd learned most everything from the textbook. Whenever he was stumped, he'd just refer to the book. But he did enjoy hanging out with the handful of computer buffs in the class and listening to their discussions. He was definitely getting a lot out of it because he would never miss a class.

Ben will be taking considerably more advanced classes this year, and I'm curious again about how he will do. As long as he has this keen interest, I'm sure he'll rise to any challenge. And I had to chuckle when my "academically behind" child told me the other day, "I like being smart!" as he smiled a self-satisfied smile. That's the beauty of unschooling. Every child is smart about many things, and unschooling allows them to find out what those things are and to be smart.

What Discipline Is

Joyce Hillman (ME) writes:

The Suzuki method of violin study is the only formal activity that Nathan (5) participates in now, and we are doing this together. One half-hour per week of private instruction from a wonderful teacher, and one half-hour per week with a small group. I have been asked how often I "make" Nathan practice. In truth, I am more likely to ask him to stop because of a bedtime or a phone conversation I'd like to hear. His little violin or his child-sized "plunk-a-plunk" piano is what he goes after most mornings. And throughout an average day, he may play for one to three hours

Hampshire I was implicitly stating that I had made it through unschooling and succeeded *in spite of* my educational choices.

Only gradually, as I reflected on both non-institutional education and the traditional college experience in my *Home Education Magazine* column, "Homeschooler in College," did the challenge between Hampshire and unschooling arise. The column kept me engaged in the homeschooling philosophy – wouldn't let me forget that at one point I had educated myself instead of paying an institution to lead me in the direction of knowledge. I started actively comparing a Hampshire education to an unschooling education and, to the credit of the college, Hampshire often broadened my horizons and instilled an education at a pace beyond anything I had done while unschooling.

Much of Hampshire's success rested on a few key improvements to the life I had led as an unschooler, namely: 1) more opportunities for socialization with peers, 2) group discussion, 3) access to additional opportunities, equipment, and facilities, 4) organized introduction to ideas and opinions that might not have been readily apparent from a single perspective, 5) incentive to stay focused and driven as a student, 6) added depth to my studies, and 7) regular interaction with mentors who were familiar with the ideas and concepts being studied. This heady list of improvements did come with a high price, though: financial cost, a removal from family, and lack of educational flexibility.

The financial cost invited scrutiny but was tolerable, the separation from family could easily be disguised as "inevitable." My educational restlessness stemmed chiefly from Hampshire's inability to afford me the flexibility that felt natural. I knew what felt natural, and starting to resent interesting fields of study just because they kept me too busy to read books for other interesting fields of study did not feel natural. It also wasn't natural to regularly spend all day writing, sleep three hours, and then start the process all over again.

Two of Hampshire's strong points were that it encouraged independent study and celebrated new ways of learning. The philosophy was good for the students, bad for the college: Hampshire's retention rate was low, largely because students were critically empowered to analyze the educational system of the college and build a better model. Sometimes that led to innovative curriculums and in other instances it was ammunition to transfer from Hampshire to another school. Or, in my case, not to return to school at all. The more I studied Hampshire, the more it became apparent that Hampshire's seven improvements to my unschooling were just that – improvements to my unschooling days of old. None of those seven factors were native to institutional education. $33,000 a year bought convenience and a template. It just so happened that I was used to piecing together an education.

Subversive unschooling dreams intermingled with temporary frustration towards Hampshire. Managing the college newspaper was consuming most of my non-study time. It was a constant battle to keep the paper functioning, and support from both the student body and the administration felt minimal. The apathy from the adminstration was particularly alarming. So, feeling not properly appreciated by the college for my role in their community, disenchanted by Hampshire in general and harboring doubts about my very need to be in college, I knew it was time to take stock and pause the institutional experience. I filed for a leave of absence in April. I was physically and emotionally tired, in addition to being frustrated and compelled to try my hand at unschooling again. I told myself that the leave of absence – a Hampshire tradition practiced by most of the student body at some point – would only be a temporary respite. I'd relax for a few weeks, earn more money to pay for college, and endeavor to complete a few independent study projects in the unschooling tradition.

How quickly my mind took one semester and turned it into a year, which then metamorphosed into an indefinite leave of absence with the possibility of never returning to college. As I began to daydream in my less-exciting classes, my notepads

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began to contain lists. Most important was the list of things I would like to learn. Another list attempted to address ways in which I could use my knowledge both of Hampshire and of non-institutional settings to craft "the ideal unschooling experience." Other lists followed, too – activities and internships I wanted to pursue, places I wanted to visit, and even a list of colleges that I might attend in trying to reach my educational goals. As I built lists, it became evident that one semester off would not be enough time to scratch the surface of all my sprouting plans.

Taking a leave of absence felt like my first conscious college decision – as if I had finally made an uninfluenced choice. Racing from my first tentative steps in a classroom in 1996 to the end of my first year of college away from home in 1999, there had never been time to stop for any significant introspection. I had enough time to recognize that the structure of a traditional college would not suffice. I did not, however, listen to my own rhythms or question the fundamental system. Just as it took me the first ten years of my life to be ready for printed words (I learned to read at the age of 10), it took another ten years before I was ready for college – on my own terms.

I had a few years of college under my belt. Now what did I want? My mind wandered and stumbled upon traveling abroad, documentary work, mentors, long weekends in libraries, computers, unschooling study groups, and even the creation of a few world wide web sites. My need to focus on a single activity made itself known (instead of concurrently studying four or more subjects), as well as a need for relatively unrestrictive academic work that allowed me to follow my education where it led. Ideally, my immediate future would consist of the unschooling pleasures I used to enjoy, mixed with some I had neglected and others that had only made themselves apparent after I attended college.

Despite glorious, impassioned plans, however, there was still a fundamental issue: could I realistically rise out of college? I had a genuine desire to have another go at unschooling and there was no physical barrier to my leaving college. I would again have to face disapproving looks from certain friends, though, and the subtle condemnation from society. In my world, "Where do you attend college?" had become nearly as prevalent as the phrase "Stay in school." I'd have to prove my educational choice again and return to the inconvenient fringe of society (out of school while most of my peers were in college, a loss of "full-time student" status while nevertheless devoting myself to full-time study, etc.). The remaining conflict couldn't be resolved easily.

I decided that the leave of absence would be a test. There was no answer to my final concern nor knowledge of unknown obstacles to come. After plans to learn photography, experiment with nonlinear video editing, toy with various computer operating systems, and journey on an exploratory road trip to New England had been realized, I could only hope to know if rising out of college was the right choice for my life. The call for rest could be a seductive force, after all, and I *was* ready for a break. I couldn't be certain that sheer tiredness was not the reason for taking a leave of absence.

Am I taking a break from college or have I just finished a break from unschooling?

A version of Peter's piece on leaving college appeared in the Sept./Oct. issue of Home Education Magazine.

We've printed stories in the past from homeschoolers who decided not to go to college at all. Let's hear from more who fit this description. What are you doing instead of college? Are the questions you get from others different from the ones you got when you weren't in school at younger ages?

Still a Homeschooler

In our section on homeschoolers in college in our last issue, Dori Griffin wrote about finding her niche during her first year of college. After that issue went to press, Dori sent another letter about striving to maintain her sense of herself as a homeschooler, even while in college. Since it connects with what Peter Kowalke writes, above, we include Dori's further comments here:

There are a lot of things about college – supposedly "givens" – that I can't agree with: grades, busywork assignments, the whole idea of general education requirements, an institution running my life. Yet I'm in a double bind. Because of my scholarship, it's important that I succeed by traditional standards. I may think that grading is a humiliating, unfair, irrelevant process, but I'm stuck trying to get good grades regardless. I may think general education requirements are useless, tyrannical, and a waste of my time, but I'm stuck taking 32 credit hours of them anyhow. Sometimes it feels like I'm trying to get two college educations at once: theirs and mine. It's a real struggle to keep in mind that mine is just as important as theirs – maybe even more so.

My biggest worry has always been getting through college and finding

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myself – the parts of me that are "Dori" and that I value – still intact. Since I had a fairly disastrous experience in that regard after my first encounter with traditional school years ago, there's always a part of me that wonders if I'll be able to make it, if this time will be any different. I've just recently realized that I've developed a set of survival tactics in this regard, somewhat similar to the survival tactics that allow me to study efficiently and coast through classes that I decide I don't have inordinate amounts of time to spend on. (Sometimes I feel guilty about this, by the way, but one can't do everything, so cramming and then forgetting is one way to cope and to find time for more important things.)

One of the survival tactics is, simply enough, to still think of myself and describe myself as a homeschooler as much as possible. I mention homeschooling whenever I have an opening at school; the reception depends on what sort of class I'm taking. The one full of education majors had a decidedly negative response, but most people are either curious or totally unconcerned. When I'm contributing to magazines, I've started describing myself as a "homeschooler college student" in my bionote information. I've yet to see if this makes it into print, but I'm dying to find out if it will. As much as possible, I try to carve out time to spend on my own personal learning, mostly by reading books I'm interested in. Sometimes I'm able to combine this with my course work; my Adolescent Literature professor allowed me to count some fairly unorthodox titles toward my quota of required reading in that course, probably because there just weren't enough books on the approved list that I hadn't read before.

My other major survival tactic is somthing of a take-off on the record-keeping system my family uses. We've always kept daily or weekly activity logs, where we list the books we've read, places we've visited, public television programs we've watched, writen work we've done, and anything else that seems relevant. A few weeks ago, when I was feeling disgusted with how little I'd accomplished in the past year, I started a list of my accomplishments over the summer. I was surprised by how much I'd done that was truly important and meaningful to me. I'd met my goals for the literary magazine I publish and written some 65 pages of fiction, for instance. Then I made a list of things I'd done during the fall and spring semesters of last year – again, only the things that were somehow important to me personally, from a non-school standpoint. Some of them overlapped with school: I discovered a composer that I really liked in my music appreciation class, and I started listening to "The World" on National Public Radio during my weekly evening commute home from school. Some of them didn't overlap: I found time to read John Holt's books and attend a talk on marine biology in spite of school, not because of it. My book list revealed that I'd read about 25 books during the two semesters, plus another 30 for my literature course. Anyhow, the lists helped me see that it wasn't true that I hadn't done anything worthwhile, and I was succeeding at having a life that was meaningful to me, as opposed to one where I didn't count and only school did. That is, I think, my number one priority, and it feels good to know that I'm not ignoring it.

Corresponding with Students

Ron Richardson (WA) writes:

In GWS #130, Erin Hughey-Commers writes that she is searching for a four-year college where "the students are there because they want to be." For many years I have been corresponding with college students at elite schools such as Yale, Reed, Columbia, and Smith; also, I subscribed to college student newspapers from Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Oberlin, Amherst, and Williams. Based on my exposure to these institutions, I believe that not one of them has, overall, a student body that is there because it wants to be.

In fairness, it is clear to me that in extracurricular activities, a number of college students do want to be involved.

One thing I decided to do about all this was to create in 1998 Kangaroo College, which is free – no exams, no degrees. Rather, teen unschoolers correspond with the facilitator of Kangaroo, me, via snail mail. I'm competent to discuss the humanities and social sciences, plus some aspects of science and business. Generally I am working with only a few unschoolers at a time. (See my declassified ad in GWS for details.) And how many of my "students" want to do Kangaroo? They all want to. To do Kangaroo is to ask a question. ◆

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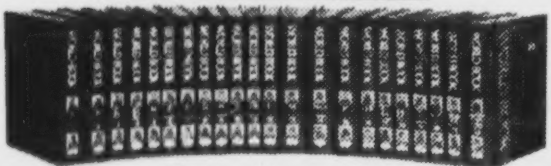

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Resources & Recommendations

World History Videos

Mel Brauner of Oregon writes:

I learned most of the world history I know through videos – documentaries and otherwise. One of the best video sets is "The Six Wives of King Henry VIII," which was made by the BBC. There is one video for each wife, each one leading into the story of the next wife to come. Most libraries have the set. They're useful for teens especially (or an ambitious younger child).

I actually first discovered these videos in school. Right before I left school, I had one teacher who used all his influence (he was a basketball coach, and the principal let him get away with things) to get around the system and teach world history in a way that was more fun for the people involved. First he gave absolutely hilarious lectures that were like listening to an historically correct stand-up comedy act. Then we watched these videos in class. I watched them again on my own after I left school, and have recently shared them with my younger sister.

It helps, when watching them, to read a little bit of the history out of the encyclopedia first, just to help you remember which heir goes with which princess dowager, and whose representative from Spain disagrees with whose minister. The video set is particularly interesting because it makes something dramatic out of something that could be otherwise unexciting. To see the Tudor family as real people who argued and got irrational and got married and had children – that's the thought provoking thing. To learn history, I think you should either see it in this format, or do re-enactments. I used to write biographical/comedy skits about famous people, mythological characters, etc., and it puts them into perspective. You find yourself dressing up as these people at Halloween and pinning pictures of them to your wall. I also like other alternative methods of learning history: I love Larry Gonick's books, especially *The Cartoon History of the Universe*, and the books by Richard Armour, like *It All Started with Europa*, and Dave Barry's *A Sort of History of the United States*.

Games: Geography, Strategy, Math

Phoebe Wells (MA) writes:

Neither Eoin (12) nor Daire (7) can stand the type of game that requires you to answer a question about history or solve a math problem before you can proceed. They can smell the educational value a mile away and will avoid it like the plague. One new game we've enjoyed is Maptitude by Resouce Games (PO Box 151, Redmond WA 98052; 425-883-3143). Finally, a good geography game without quizzes! The games comes with 192 Country Cards, one for each of the world's sovereign states, which give a surprising amount of information about each country, including a map, flag, languages, literacy rate, currency, and more. The game can be played simply by gaining points for border matches and connecting cards from each continent. More advanced strategists can go on to playing the Country Showdown using the area and population statistics given on each card.

One of Daire's most recent favorites is Perplexing Pentagons, a Perpetual Patterns Puzzle by Tessellations (1-800-655-5341; http://members.aol.com/tesselatns). This puzzle combines the best of pattern blocks, tangrams, and harder tessellating puzzles like Tessera by DaMert Company (Berkeley, CA). These pentagons are perplexing because the shapes are "folded" – that is, they look like one of the points has caved in. The set comes with a total of 56 folded pentagons in four colors. They can be used to make lovely designs and tangram-like shapes (people, animals, etc.). The set also comes with some brain teasers, outlines of shapes you can try to make, such as spirals, hexagons, and more. Daire's had hours of absorbed fun and geometric explorations.

I've very fortunate to live near a small, independently owned game store run by opinionated people who are very frank about which games they sell only because people ask for them and which are the really good games. When I went in before Eoin's last birthday requesting a challenging strategy game and refusing to buy one with a war motif (my own bias), they immediately handed me The Settlers of Catan by Mayfair Games (5211 W 65 St, Bedford Park IL 60638; www.mayfairgames.com). Recommended for ages 12 to adult. Settlers combines probability (dice rolls) and much strategizing to obtain various resources at different stages of the game to eventually develop roads, cities, etc. The game requires three or four players and can be played in teams. From what I've heard from Eoin and his game-playing friends, Settlers is the best new strategy game out there.

Other popular games for our kids are those that have interesting enough boards and pieces so that once the boys are bored with the game as it was intended, they make up their own. Some favorites for both playing and inventing with are Harvest Time by Family Pastimes (RR 4, Perth, ON Canada K7H 3C6; 613-267-4819) By Jove by Aristoplay (PO Box 7645, Ann Arbor MI 48107), Eagle Kingdoms by Gamewright (PO Box 370219, W Hartford CT 06137; 203-586-8173), Nectar Collector by Animal Town (PO Box 20002, Santa Barbara CA 93120) and Risk by Parker Brothers. In fact, the smaller companies I've listed offer many games with beautiful boards and unusual pieces in almost every subject imaginable. ◆

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1999 Directory was published in GWS #126. The next one will be in GWS #132.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is *not* a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CO — Rebecca HERRON-DONISVITCH (Alyra/91, Soren/95) 3937 Dale Dr, Lafayette 80026

FL — Steve & Kathy CROWELL (Mike/87, Stacy/88) 895 Oakridge Rd, St Augustine 32086 **(H)** ••• Christy & Patrick MAHONEY (Darcy/95) 147B Azalea Dr, Eglin AFB 32542 ••• Bibi & John LeBLANC (Christopher/94, Benjamin/98) 1699 Stone Rd, Deland 32720 **(H)** ••• Emilio & Lourdes SOTOLONGO (Erik/94) 17045 NW 78 Ct, Miami 33015

IL — John & Janet BURNS (Emma/93, Owen/95, Nora/99) 93 W Honeysuckle Dr, Round Lake Beach 60073 **(H)**

KY — Terry & Kathy Jo GUTGSELL (Luke/78, Michael/87, Jessie/89) 3480 Keene Rd, Nicholasville 40356 **(H)**

ME — Rick & Joyce HILLMAN (Nathan/94) 230 Fisher Rd, Monroe 04951

MA — Matthew & Catherine CARR (Sarah/89, Reed/92, Caleb/97) PO Box 302, Hardwick 01037 **(H)**

MO — Corliss SCHAEFFER & George OCEAN (Forrest/86, Melody/89) PO Box 821, West Plains 65775 (change) **(H)**

NV — Patricia MOEN & David EMME (Andre/91, Nathan/93, Maya/96, Julian/96) 5475 Hazelwood Cir, Reno 89511 **(H)**

NY — Sharon FITZGERALD & Richard CHERRY (Ada/85, Irene/87, Garnet/90, Jasper/94, Emrys/97) RR 3 Box 18A, Cambridge 12816 (change) **(H)** ••• Pamela MOSS & Brian HALL (Madeleine/92, Cora/95) 819 N Tioga St, Ithaca 14850 (change) **(H)**

NC — Joy & David CROSBY (Laurel/86, John David/95) 2847 Zion Church Rd, Hickory 28602 **(H)**

OK — Chuck & Paulet GARRETT (Zach/86, Joshua/89, Benjamin/92) PO Box 326, Broken Arrow 74013

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SC — Suzanne BUICE (Christopher/87, Sarah/93) 512 Irwin Av, Spartanburg 29306

TX — George & Joy SMITH (Michael/85, Matthew/89, Caroline/96, Daniel/99) 16426 Heatherdale, Houston 77059

VT — Chris & Gina KROL (Emily/88, Adam/91, Jeremy/93) 64 Ridgewood Dr, Burlington 05401 (change) ••• Kelly & Barry KING (Elizabeth/88, Sarah/90, Benjamin/93, Noah/96) 26 Saxon Ln, Jericho 05465-3040 **(H)**

VA — Alex & Lisa FREESE (Kristofer/87, Jens-Peter/94, Annika/98) 410 S Virginia Av, Falls Church 22046 ••• David & Nooshin PARTINGTON (Eman/87, Estell/90) 5545 Jamestown Rd, Crozet 22932 **(H)** ••• Gary & Suzanne MOSS (Kevin/88, Alaurah/90) 510 Oak Grove Rd, Norfolk 23505 **(H)**

WI — Roger & Roberta ELLIOTT (Troy/86, Erin/90) 4120 Fairview Rd, Edgar 54426 (change) **(H)**

Other Locations — Peggy & Marty ANDERIES (Barrett/94, Ausette/98) 20 Alfred Hill Dr, Melba, ACT **Australia** 2615 **(H)** ••• Terrie & Khalid RASHEED (Abdullah/83) PO Box 25239, Riyadh 11466 **Saudi Arabia**

Address Changes to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #126:

IN: Indiana Association of Home Educators, 8106 Madison Av, Indianapolis 46227

OH Home Education League of Parents (Central Ohio), 4132 Spring Flower Ct, Columbus 43230

SC Carolina Superschoolers, B J Buckner, 103 Dill Cir, Landrum 29356 ••• South Carolina Homeschool Alliance, 2420 Golf Course Rd, Lancaster 29720

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1999 Directory (GWS #126)? Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

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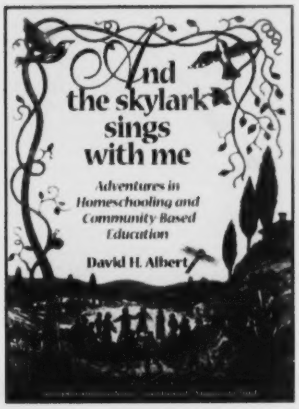
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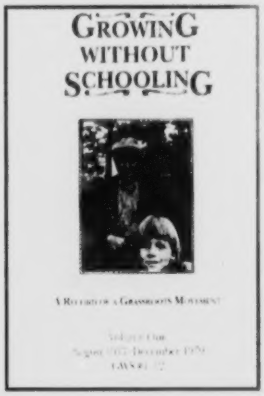
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